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# And The Sphinx Spoke

By  
Paul Eldridge.



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AND THE SPHINX SPOKE



# And The Sphinx Spoke

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THE STRATFORD COMPANY  
*Publishers*

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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The STRATFORD CO., Publishers ✓  
Boston, Mass.



The Alpine Press, Boston, Mass., U. S. A.

SEP -1 1921 ✓

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## Dedication

*A Sylvia—Petit Sphinx Bizarre*



## Contents

	PAGE
Paradise Regained . . . . .	1
The Chinese Doll . . . . .	8
An Old Woman Falling Asleep . . . . .	14
The Golden Wedding . . . . .	18
A Culprit . . . . .	23
Dead Leaves . . . . .	32
Their Dreams . . . . .	37
Time . . . . .	43
The Golden Apple . . . . .	53
Words . . . . .	59
Three Men . . . . .	68
Art . . . . .	71
Evil's Good . . . . .	73
Crosses . . . . .	76
Worms and Butterflies . . . . .	78
Pastels:	
Happiness . . . . .	87
The Thinker . . . . .	89
Popularity . . . . .	89
Chacun a Sa Maniere . . . . .	90
Mouse Preaches on Heaven . . . . .	90
Grain of Dust . . . . .	90
A Divine Jest . . . . .	90

## CONTENTS

The Ocean in Labor	. . . . .	92
I Am the Coffin	. . . . .	92
Morituri Te Salutant	. . . . .	93
Icebergs	. . . . .	93
The Cat and His Shadow	. . . . .	94
Caterpillar and Butterly	. . . . .	95
Illusion	. . . . .	96
The Final Reckoning	. . . . .	97
Consolation or Sour Grapes	. . . . .	97
Free Will	. . . . .	98
To Posterity	. . . . .	99

## Introduction

THIS would be a worthless world without intellectual and artistic pessimists. They are the supreme critics of life. From Æschylus to Joseph Conrad they have pronounced the single word "Vanitas." They are the everlasting Nay-sayers.

The pessimists have created some of the greatest works of literature of all time. From the "Œdipus Rex" of Sophocles to "The Mysterious Stranger" of Mark Twain—a roll call of the poets, prophets, novelists and philosophers who have hurled their imprecations at Life and its Author would be a roster of most of the geniuses of the ages.

There is something solid and substantial in pessimistic poets and philosophers. Optimism is the easiest way. To bawl, "Cheer up!—all's right with the world!" pays—witness Elbert Hubbard and Doctor Crane. The solidity and substantiality of pessimists is rooted in final thought and feeling. A great pessimist is never a coward; an optimist is seldom anything else.

Still, the paradox of the whole matter lies in this: the cry of the pessimist against life is the cry of a soul who has said Yea to life instinctively. He is so full of vitality and vision and the will-to-live that this earth and its baubles cannot satisfy him. He is a super-consciousness, a militant mystic. The opti-

## INTRODUCTION

mist is really deficient in vitality and vision. He cannot face Reality. He falls on his knees in fear before the Inexorable and Implacable. So he evolves a system, a mask, an organ of defence, a lie. He is the supreme enemy of Truth.

Not that the pessimist necessarily knows the Truth. Truth is only a temperament. But he dares to affirm Evil. He is a challenge. He is Lucifer, and he wars against the smug Jehovahs and the Tupper of the Stars.

Pessimism, in a word, is the soul of man raised to the highest zenith of embattled consciousness.

I first came across that perfect artistic pessimist, Paul Eldridge, in "Vanitas," his first book of poems, I believe. I saw in him a spirit as rare as Poe, or Baudelaire, or Leopardi. Not that he has written poems that are always the equal of these sublime pessimists—that does not matter; but in his exquisitely chiselled imprecations I recognized a man who was of their high aristocratic lineage; one who existed on their spiritual and intellectual plane; one who was heir to the Dreadful Vision; one who had ripped the veil from the face of Isis—and was not afraid.

Paul Eldridge is as fine an artist as he is an incorrigible pessimist. The stories and prose poems in this book are among the unique things in American literature. They are allegories of life written by a man who records mournfully and artistically—but *always* artistically.

Who are his forbears? Baudelaire, Anatole France,

## INTRODUCTION

Jules Laforgue, Ambrose Bierce, Swift—I know not. One must have artistic forbears.

“The Chinese Doll,” in my opinion, is one of the most powerful and most perfect things in any literature. Neither Baudelaire nor Poe has ever done anything better. To have read it—well, do so.

Introductions never mean much. This volume must be read. It will appeal to that immortal Ten Thousand which I believe Stendhal said always have existed on earth—the Ten Thousand worth writing for.

BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.



## *And The Sphinx Spoke*

(To Benjamin De Casseres)

THE Sphinx squatted in the middle of the Earth, and looked into infinite Space and across eternal Time. The shadows of Life and Death danced weird, fantastic chiaroscuro dances upon his brow, and Truth, half-goddess, half-star, glittered in his eyes.

The Centuries one by one knelt in awe before him, and passed on. And the Earth, weary, deluded Seeker, lamented in endless monotone: "The Sphinx alone knows. He has gauged the mystery of Things. Oh, if only his lips would open, and his mouth relate!"

But the Sphinx was silent. He looked into infinite Space and across eternal Time, and was silent. . . .

At last, the Sphinx raised his mighty paw into the air, and the Earth knelt, and awaited his eternal verdict.

Slowly, hoarsely, in a tremulous voice, the Sphinx uttered the wisdom of the Centuries that passed to the Centuries that will follow:

"The . . . thand . . . ith . . . dry!"



## Acknowledgment

THANKS ARE DUE TO THE EDITORS OF THE VARIOUS  
MAGAZINES FOR PERMISSION TO REPRINT IN THIS  
VOLUME SEVERAL OF THE MANUSCRIPTS  
PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED BY THEM.



## PARADISE REGAINED

CENTURIES had passed since Adam and his wife, Eve, had been driven, as one should be driven out of Paradise, disgraced, hungry and naked. Being human, they had long forgiven and forgotten their father's cruelty, and spoke of him to their countless descendants as merciful, tender, and wise.

Though divine hearts pump slowly and coolly, Yahweh, too, at last, relented. He sent a messenger to the ancient pair, to invite them to return to Eden as supreme monarchs of all things therein, including this time the Tree of Knowledge, since they had already eaten of it.

Although Adam and Eve had learned to love the Earth, which they had beaten and broken into fields and gardens, they always yearned to go back to their native spot. They accepted, therefore, the invitation with many thanks to the messenger, and countless prayers and hallelujahs for their merciful Creator.

When they reached the portals of Paradise, their hearts sank, for what they saw was but an iron fence, not much taller than themselves, and red with the rust. They looked at each other understandingly, but kept silent. The two guardians, who had awed them at their dismissal, were old sleepy angels, with moth-eaten wings, and their mighty swords were dull-edged, rusty bayonets, on the point of falling out of their half-closed fists.

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

The couple thought how easy it might have been for them, had they known it, to overcome these guards, and return long ago. They greeted the two angels cordially, nevertheless, but they received no answer save a weary glance, as that from half-awakened dogs.

“My dear,” Eve whispered to Adam, and grasped tightly his strong arm. He patted her hand gently.

The Garden smelt mouldy and sour, for nothing died here, but everything got old, staid old, and became older eternally. It was early morning, and they expected to hear the birds sing; but the birds perched upon the black branches, were dumb. They looked at their masters, unconcerned, showing neither joy nor regret. The wind stirred drearily the very yellow leaves, and produced a rasping sound like the sharpening of knives and scissors. The Sun was neither warm nor cool, and shone in parts only like muddy glass.

“Dearest—dearest,” whispered pathetically the Ancient Mother, and Adam, the tender Giant, kissed her, and soothed her.

With difficulty they recognized the Tree of Knowledge. They looked at it long and reminiscingly, as it had been the very source of their tragedy. The apples were yellow, creased, and shrunken to the size of nuts. Adam touched one. It fell immediately to the ground. He raised it, and bit into it.

“You take the rest, dearest,” he said to his beloved wife, “so you shall no longer be called the guilty one, —although you know how little I think of you as a culprit.”

## PARADISE REGAINED

She thanked him, looked into his kind eyes, and ate the rest of the apple. They expected some profound revelation, but there was nothing save an instinctive motion to hide their nakedness. But they were both dressed now, and so they smiled.

Adam whispered into her ear: "We have much better ones in our orchard, haven't we, dear?"

"Yes." And she kissed his big, capable hands.

Slowly the Snake dragged himself to a sunny part of the Garden. Eve saw him, and uttered a small stifled cry.

"What is it, dear?"

She pointed to their arch-enemy of yore. Adam looked, unwilling to believe.

"He? He?"

She nodded.

"How small, how thin, how stupid he looks! Why, he is not much bigger than the worms that the great-grandchildren of our great-great-grandchildren use for bait for the fine fish they catch in our lakes!"

The Serpent looked up, and seeing once more his former masters, whom he had wronged so, turned about himself as tightly as he could in shame and contrition, and hissed feebly,—“Forgive me.”

With the politeness of a man who has lived long out of Paradise, Adam answered immediately: "There is nothing to forgive you for,—nothing, my friend. Is there, Eve?"

"No—nothing."

The Snake unwound again slowly, and dragged himself away.

Animals of various kinds, wild and domestic, all

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

old and weary, passed them by like mourners following a hearse,—tails and trunks and feathers dragging in the dust. Once in a while one looked up, with eyes that were invariably yellow and extinguished. Only the monkey who claimed to be the gay personage of the place, turned his tail in a pathetic effort to be clownish. Adam and Eve, being kind and polite, laughed. Their laughter, like a sudden thunder-clap, stirred for a fraction of a second to joyous mortality the immortal ones.

By this time, the couple reached the inner Garden, where the Angels dwelt. The same silence, the same monotony, the same jaundiced appearance, prevailed here. The ground was strewn with stringless harps, mouse-gnawed, and sand-eaten. The angels, naked, many one-winged and some entirely wingless, were squatting, and looking drearily at the new-comers, who bowed profoundly, considering them their superiors. No one made answer. Nothing stirred.

Suddenly they heard a voice coming from a neighboring bush. They listened intently. They seemed to recognize it, although it was much feebler, lisping and inarticulate. Yahweh, always very formal, thought it proper to speak to his prodigal children, as of yore, through a bush, although the bush would no longer shine with his presence.

Adam and Eve knelt before the bush, but being unable to distinguish the weak sounds that filtered through the leaves, they answered in clear, human sounds: "Forgive us, Father, we cannot understand!"

## PARADISE REGAINED

After another effort or two, Yahweh, finding it impossible to keep up his rôle, came out of the bush. He was old and yellow-eyed like the animals and the angels, and his voice rasped like the wind among the sharp, hardened leaves; but there was something about him that resembled Adam—an old, decrepit Adam—and Eve burst into tears.

Yahweh spoke: “You are forgiven your sin, though I had never meant to forgive you. Now you are masters once more over Eden, and all that is within it, save the angels and Myself. Obey what the angels command you, and what I command you, and you shall never die, even as ourselves!”

And as though thoroughly wearied or disgusted, Yahweh turned his back upon them, and walked slowly off.

Adam rose. “The same as ever,—domineering and harsh! And always insisting upon obedience. But weak, and much slighter than myself. Had I seen him face to face the first time, he should never have driven us out, foodless and naked. Come, dear, stop crying. Get up!” He helped her, and wiped her tears.

“Now come,—let us hurry out of this place, before we, too, become jaundiced with eternity. Let us rush back to our beautiful Earth, which we have broken into a garden where birds sing and animals run, and children laugh to shake the trees with gladness.”

Eve looked into his eyes sadly, and said nothing.

“I wonder—if Eden was always so—and we were blind being within it! I wonder. But let us hurry, for something of this air is already clinging to you,

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

my dearest." And as he spoke, he pulled Eve after him. They passed the animals who were dragging their tails or trunks in the dust; they passed the Snake, who, remembering something of his former flattery, hissed,—“My beautiful masters.” The birds were still dumb; the Sun had become lurid with some rags of clouds. At the gate, the two guardians blinked, their swords sliding out of their hands.

“I know. I have a cure for Eden. I know!”

Eve looked at him, more youthful with the Earth-air.

“I will bring my sons, and their sons—and we shall set fire to it. Everything shall burn like dry hay—everything—every one!”

Eve shrieked.

“What’s the matter?”

“Never! Never! I shall never let you!”

Adam had never heard his wife contradict him. He had never heard her shout.

“What do you mean, Eve?”

“I shall never let you. We must still worship Yahweh and the angels!”

“How can you say that?”

“We must tell our children and all our descendants that Eden is beautiful—that the birds sing—that the animals run about and are eternally happy—that the Tree of Knowledge is luxuriant—that our Father is mighty—that—”

“Why?”

“They must never know what our origin is!”

“I shall tell them the truth!”

“No, you shall not!”

## PARADISE REGAINED

Adam looked at Eve, overwhelmed by her audacity.

Eve continued, softly, taking his hands into hers, and kissing them. "My love is boundless for you, my husband. My faithfulness has been more constant than the Earth. Promise me, dearest, promise me—you will never tell the truth. Promise to let me tell them what is just and fitting. Else I shall turn back—to Eden—I shall die of shame!"

Adam remained silent. Eve caressed him, smoothed his face with her soft hand, reminded him of past joys, promised him keener ones in the future. Adam nodded at last. "I promise."

At once he regretted, but it was too late. He thought: "This is the second time she has seduced me. She brought upon the Earth, first the era of pain, and now the era of lies." And he hated her. But Eve continued to caress his face, and murmur endless promises. His blood coursed hotly within him, and his lips sought hers.

He thought: "Some one will be born, some one stronger than I, who will burn Eden—who will burn it to ashes."

## THE CHINESE DOLL

HER name used to be Pierette, but it seemed too girlish for such an old woman, and so it was shortened to Pierre, which made people laugh. The gods blessed her with their greatest gift—life. She was ninety-four years old, maybe a trifle older,—for had she not perhaps long ago pretended to be a little younger than she actually was, as most women do,—and afterwards, forgetting, miscounted?

However, the number of years she lived mattered but little, for she had forgotten everything—events, emotions, thoughts, as a tree forgets the leaves it has shed. People pitied her—“Not even a memory, it’s terrible!” How silly! Memories are hideous, hideous as the shadows of withered leaves that cling to trees, sometimes, in winter.

“Pierre” lived with her grand-daughter, who was very kind to her. When she could no longer use her legs, they bought an invalid’s chair, wrapped her up tightly with a lap-robe, and rolled her to the window. At the window she spent her days, looking vaguely at the atmosphere, or dozing. Most of the time she dozed. At night, she could not sleep. Her grand-daughter struck upon a remedy. She stopped moving her from the chair to her bed, kept a light burning the whole night through, and the old woman looked vaguely about and dozed.

It was difficult to ascertain whether she could still

## THE CHINESE DOLL

speak. At times she would utter a few sounds, but her tongue slipped over her black gums, and nobody understood her. That she could hear was quite evident, for the family often tried her by striking hard metals against each other, or shouting. She would always turn her head, and look, and immediately growing weary of the effort, she would close her eyes, slowly, like a sleepy cat annoyed by a buzzing fly.

Neighbors and relatives always asked about her, and her grand-daughter always answered—"As nice as ever, thank you." They would look at her, smile, jest, and pat her softly, afraid of crumbling her. A young reporter of a local paper wrote a whole column about her—discussing incidentally himself, his family, the great personages dead since her girlhood, kings and emperors throned and unthroned, and the wonderful things invented. He concluded his article with "What a marvelous blessing to live so long!" as LaFontaine used to conclude his fables with a very useful moral.

Somehow it was rumored among the students of a dental school that an old woman, a hundred years old or more, had suddenly erupted a third dentition. Two professors and several students came to see "Pierre." They opened her mouth wide, looked in, struck her gums with an instrument, talked and talked, and left, disappointed, but still hopeful. . . .

At the age of three, Margie, "Pierre's" great-grand-daughter, developed a passion for dolls. The rooms were strewn with them—of all sizes and of all materials—paper, rags, celluloid, wood. All that could be broken or torn, lay pathetically about like dead and

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

dying soldiers—armless, headless, open bellies, their bowels of straw trailing underneath chairs, eyes still hanging out of their sockets by bits of thread, back-bones broken like those of acrobats, legs outspread to the hips like clever danseuses. . . .

A friend of "Pierre's" grand-daughter remarked one day to the latter: "Doesn't your grand-mother look just like a doll, a Chinese doll?"

The grand-daughter looked, and was struck by the truth of it.

"She certainly does! It never occurred to me before."

"Did she always have such a flat nose, squinting eyes, and yellow skin?"

"No—hardly—she is getting more and more that way. I wonder if they all get that way—or—"

Margie listened attentively to the two women, and thought and re-thought in her little head. Then, suddenly, as though she had just made up her mind, she walked over to her great grand-mother and tried to lift her in her arms. Finding this impossible, she began to play with her—pulling down her eye-lids, raising and dropping her arms, opening her mouth. The old woman looked, amazed at her descendant, and tried to doze off, but the little girl was too insistent. She stood up on her tip-toes, and tried to push her thumb into the tearing eyes. The old woman moaned. Her grand-daughter who was busy talking to her friend, turned around.

"What are you doing there, Margie?"

"This ith my doll!"

## THE CHINESE DOLL

“Your what?”

“My thinese doll!”

The two women looked at each other, taken aback. Then they burst out laughing.

“That’s your Thinese doll, is it?” asked the friend.

“Yeth.”

Margie swept with her tiny feet all her dolls of rag, wood and celluloid, and spent her time exclusively on her new toy. It was a wonderful doll indeed—a doll that could close and open its eyes, that could breathe, and moan, that could open a black mouth, and stick out a red tongue, and drink water, and eat bread—a marvelous doll!

On Margie’s birthday, her mother bought her doll a Chinese kimono, and she invited all her little friends to see the wonderful toy. She showed them how she could close and open her mouth, how she could breathe and moan. The older folks laughed, the little children stared in utter amazement. They all asked their parents, if they, too, could get Chinese dolls, and these were promised for some dim Christmas. Perhaps, indeed, they would get them. One never can tell.

“Pierre” became accustomed to the gentle tortures of her great grand-child, just as a kitten learns to accept with resignation the pulling of her tail, the kick in her side, the tickling of her nose. And Margie compromising, learned to avoid pushing her thumb into the eye of her ancestor and the tearing of the rare threads of her colorless hair. She learned to fear certain unpleasant circumstances, as she would have learned to fear the kitten’s claws.

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

In exchange for her little cruelties, Margie fed her doll on bits of candies and cakes, that the ancient woman greatly relished, and that were not given her by the older people, who feared indigestion. She insisted upon helping her mother dress and wash her doll. Never was more complete possession claimed by any one over anything.

"It's Nature's way," explained a lady, "the child feels the blood-relationship between herself and the old lady."

The explanation spoiled a little the pleasure of one of the hearers.

"I should like to think it's really the love of a child for a doll."

"That's cruel," answered the lady.

One early morning, Margie carried to her doll a bit of cake she had saved from the night previous by a fine moral "coup" against her own great desire to eat it.

The doll was very still. Her head was sunk deeply into her chest, and her mouth and eyes were wide open.

"Here—dollie—ith cake." The doll did not stir. "Here!" She shook her. But the doll was as unconcerned about the cake as ever. Then Margie put the cake into her mouth. The mouth did not close, and Margie tried in vain to force upward the lower jaw.

"You're a bad doll!" She poked her thumb into her eyes, at first gently, being afraid, then more and more deeply. The doll did not ward her off as usually. She struck her, but she did not budge. She pulled her hair and ear. But the doll was very still.

## THE CHINESE DOLL

Margie burst into tears, and stamped her little feet.  
“You bad, bad doll. I’ll tell ma.”

Her mother was still in bed, her eyes closed. Margie shook her gently.

“What’s the matter?”

“Dolly is a bad doll.”

“Sh! Let me sleep.”

“Dolly won’t eat cake, and won’t move.”

“I told you not to take cake to her. Do you want to get your dolly sick?”

“She ith a naughty doll. I poked here eyeth.”

“I told you not to do that. I’ll spank you for it.”

“I hate my doll. I’ll take the thithersh, and cut her up,” and she went off to make her threat a reality.

“Come back here! Come back here!” And the mother was forced to get up, and run after the little girl.

“It was foolish of us to let the child think her a doll. She’ll hurt her some day.”

## AN OLD WOMAN FALLING ASLEEP

THE old woman sits for hours at the window. She does not find it monotonous. At the window she can see houses, the sky with its changing phenomena, clouds, moon, sun-set, people, animals, for the old woman can still see, although one eye is entirely covered with a cataract, and the other is tearing steadily. At the window she can hear, for she is not totally deaf, the louder noises,—automobile-horns warning pedestrians, coal sliding into cellars, hucksters shouting their wares, their hands placed at the edges of their mouths, forming sounding-boards.

Frequently, however, the old woman closes her eyes, and thinks. For years now the order of her thinking has been the same. She begins by recalling the dead who once were her relatives and acquaintances. She tries not to omit one. She places them from left to right in rows, about ten in a row. The rows multiply, becoming in the distance smaller and smaller, dimmer and dimmer, until they vanish out of sight; but she knows that behind her horizon there are more and more. She sighs and nods several times.

Then she thinks of the work she has done,—for she used to be a splendid house-keeper, praised by all her neighbors, and shown off as a model to their wives by dissatisfied husbands. She thinks of the loaves of bread she baked,—every day two large ones, and she piles them up on the ground, loaves on loaves, rising

## AN OLD WOMAN FALLING ASLEEP

higher and higher until they become a little hillock, then a hill, then a mountain.

She thinks of the meat she cooked. Her family was always large, and they all liked meat, from the very tiniest to the oldest. Yes,—she has cooked much meat,—roasts, and soups, and steaks,—and she puts the pieces of meat together until they form oxen and pigs and fowls of all kinds—enormous flocks—tramping on, bellowing, screaming, screeching,—a crazy army that makes her laugh.

And the vegetables she used with these? Carrots and parsnips and peas, and corn, and potatoes, and tomatoes,—that break the Earth like a volcano, and grow into monster trees, and colossal leaves, smothering the world with their shadows. And she thinks of a knife large enough to peel that mountain of a potato—a knife with a blade as wide as the street, no, two streets, ten streets, and sharp, sharp as the lightning that she saw setting ablaze her cousin's house, years, years ago,—and she shudders. She always hated knives, and hatchets, and hammers. Her fingers and nails were always bruised and cut.

She suddenly recollects that she has not included the fish. She used to like fish! Now she does not dare to eat them. She cannot see the tiny bones, and her hands tremble too much. A thin fluid courses down her throat, leaving a pleasurable taste behind. Twice a week for fifty years she cooked and baked and broiled fish—every kind obtainable and every size, from tiny ones like matches to enormous ones, heavy as pigs, whose lifting hurt the muscles of her back. She

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

tightens her eyes, and she can see them alive—thousands of them, crowded uncomfortably together in a vast basin that resembles her grandchild's gold-fish aquarium—the small ones swimming on the backs of the larger ones, that open and close their mouths like petulant women.

She always remembers the laundering she has done. What a task! how her head used to swim and her back hurt! Dense vapors rise as though the Earth were being boiled, and the old woman coughs, little coughs like the hammering of tacks. Yes, if sheet were sewed to sheet it would make a bag large enough to put in a mountain, the whole Earth.

When she has finished thinking of her work, she thinks of her off-spring. She counts them and names them in order of their age—six sons, twenty grandchildren, twelve great-grandchildren. She arranges them like a photographer,—in front the tiny ones sitting on the ground, behind them the larger ones sitting on chairs, and last of all her sons, standing—two already old, two turning, gray, two still young.

She thinks how good they are to her, how sweetly one grandchild sings, how successful another is, and her eyelids paste with tears. She is satisfied. She has done her duty. She is happy. The children and grand-children, and great grand-children overlap one another; they become fluid; they recede—and her head sinks on her bony chest, her lower jaw falls, and she begins to dream—cemeteries and loaves of bread rising point on point, like an endless pyramid, and oxen with faces of chickens, and chickens with big

## AN OLD WOMAN FALLING ASLEEP

cloven hoofs—and little children—and fish—tiny fish like matches—and large ones, heavy as pigs, that make her back ache, and she moans. . . .

## THE GOLDEN WEDDING

**M**R. AND MRS. LATOUR, having been married for fifty years, their children insisted upon a "Golden-wedding." The two daughters who lived in the same city decorated the home of the old folks. Wherever possible, yellow things, in imitation of gold, were used. The old woman had a dress made, with a long train, and gold lace, like a royal official; the old man wore his full-dress, but the younger daughter insisted that he wear upon his lapel a golden flower she had embroidered.

On the day of the celebration the four children with their consorts and their children, as well as some relatives, crowded the apartment of the bride and bridegroom. A grand-daughter played the Mendelssohn's "Wedding-March," and the old folks, amidst much laughter and applause, walked up and down the parlor, arm in arm, the poor thin bride stepping often with her flat rheumatic feet on the endless train of her dress. Then four grandchildren, the oldest and the youngest included, recited four more or less appropriate recitations, which made the bride weep, the groom nod incessantly, and the rest of the guests suitably serious. A photographer was called in to take pictures. Several bottles of champagne (the surprise-gift of the oldest son) were opened; toasts, some over-serious, and some smartly suggestive, were delivered, and the guests left, "to permit the newly wedded

## THE GOLDEN WEDDING

couple to retire," as one son-in-law reputed for wit, remarked.

The two daughters promised to return the next morning, and clean up, and warned the old folks not to attempt to do anything themselves.

Mr. Latour, still gay, led his bride chivalrously to a large armchair, and then seated himself near her.

"Well, dear," he said, "you enjoyed yourself, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I am very tired."

"Of course, a little bride like you would get tired. How did you like the baby reciting?"

"She's a dear."

"We can't deny it,—God has blessed us with splendid children."

The table covered with the remains of the feast, and the broken echoes that seemed still to run vaguely through the rooms, seemed as pathetic as the old couple themselves.

The old man, always given to sentimental meditation, thought: "Life is a dream that grows old, and crumbles, and turns to sand. Life is gilded dust, but the gilt is rubbed off, and the dust remains."

To ward off a chill that began to shake him, he poured himself out a glass of champagne. The wine, coursing through his old veins, warmed him, and he felt merrier. He approached his wife, and patted her big gnarled hands, that seemed to be covered with a kind of sand-paper.

"Dear, our life has been a happy one, considering what happiness one can get out of life."

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

“Yes, dear.”

“You have been a fine little wife to me. Have I been bad to you?”

“No, never. You have been a good husband, as good a husband as I should want my daughters to have always.”

“You know, dear, I have never betrayed you.”

He watched the old woman. He expected a caress and praise for his remark, but the old woman rubbed her feet, and moaned.

“Do you remember Jennie—what’s her second name—I can’t seem to recollect—she’s been dead now twenty years at least. . . .”

“Oh yes, I remember. You mean the one with the reddish hair?”

“That’s right. Well, she was a pretty girl, wasn’t she?”

“Yes, very pretty.”

“Well, she was dead in love with me; and I liked her too—a lot—as I think of it now—but I spurned her love—I didn’t want to betray you. She was so heart-broken,—she married an old widower who used to beat her.”

“Yes, she was pretty,” the old woman repeated, as she continued rubbing her flat rheumatic feet.

“And there was Annie. You didn’t know her. Her I really loved. But I said to myself and her: ‘I have promised to be faithful to my wife, and will be so to the end of my days.’ It wasn’t easy, though. I can say it calmly now, but then—I really had to fight a hard battle—and the poor girl—”

## THE GOLDEN WEDDING

“Dear, bring me some of the ointment. You made me walk so much, and now my feet torture me.”

The old man brought the ointment, and she rubbed her callous feet, blue with the swollen veins. The ointment exhaled a smell of garlic and mustard, and the old man turned his face away. She put her stockings on again, feeling relieved.

“The best ointment I’ve ever used. You’ll have to get me another bottle. It’s almost gone.”

Now that the pain had ceased, she felt pleasantly drowsy, and began to yawn, widely and repeatedly, showing pale uneven gums, with a black tooth here and there.

“Yes, there is nothing like being faithful,” the old man insisted. He was in his sentimental mood, increased by the champagne he had drunk, and he longed for commendation.

The old woman’s eyes closed slowly, and her mouth opened. One or two flies buzzed across her face, and she shook her head to ward them off.

The old man was seized with disgust. He drank another glass of champagne, and seated himself deeply in an arm-chair. The women he had loved, but renounced, appeared before him, young and pretty, as he had seen them in his youth, and taunted him with smiles, and pouting lips. He tried to embrace them, but they vanished, and in their place he saw opposite him, his wife, her withered head on her sunken chest, snoring, and twisting her open mouth, trying to drive off the flies.

“And all for this hag!” the old man thought, ex-

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

cited by the champagne. An impulse to go and choke her overwhelmed him, but his feet were too heavy, and his head was swimming.

“All for this hag!” he repeated; “life is mud!”

His eyes closed, his mouth opened,—a big mouth, with half a dozen teeth on the lower jaw,—and he began to snore. Flies buzzed about his face, and he shook his head to ward them off. . . .

In a distant house some one played Mendelssohn’s “Wedding-March”. . . .

## A CULPRIT

FRANCOISE was dozing on a bench on the Bld. Montmartre, dreaming indistinctly of dishes, brooms, and her employers. Suddenly she awoke, and began to rub her left leg as though it had been asleep or stiff with rheumatism. She raised her skirt and tapped from the ankle to the buttock. Then rapidly she did the same with her right leg. Her face twitched, and she shivered. "I am robbed!" she screamed. "Police! Police!"

In a moment she was surrounded by a crowd, watching her tapping and rubbing her legs.

"What's the matter?" a few asked at one time.

"I've been dozing here a bit—I was so hot—and when I got up—I didn't find my money." And oblivious of propriety, Francoise in her despair, raised again her skirt to prove to herself and to the people about her that she was right. The people laughed, a few whispered obscene remarks into their neighbors' ears.

"Did anybody sit near you?"

"I don't know. I fell asleep." And she moaned, rubbing violently her face. "I am robbed! Three hundred and eighty francs! My God!"

"Three hundred and eighty francs!" exclaimed many voices in the crowd.

Francoise pushed the people aside, and being near-sighted, bent her face almost to the ground, seeking

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

and sniffing. like some dog that seeks traces of his master. She brushed aside bits of paper with her big knotted hands.

“Three hundred and eighty francs can’t hide under that cigarette-stub!” remarked some one, and made several laugh.

“Three hundred and eighty francs—she is crazy!”

“Impossible!”

“How much did you say,—three francs eighty?”

Francoise did not answer, but continued to scan the ground, pushing now and then the feet of the people that interfered with her.

A policeman recognizing that there was nothing of a risky nature, approached. His left thumb stuck in his belt, he dispersed the people majestically with his right hand. He watched Francoise for a moment as she was seeking, sweeping the side-walk with her open palms. Then, tapping her back, he asked, “What’s the trouble?” Francoise continued to brush the ground. He tapped her more forcibly, and asked more imperatively,—“Hey, what’s the trouble there?”

Francoise looked up, and seeing a policeman, remained stockstill, her toothless mouth wide open. The people laughed .

“What’s the matter? What are you looking for?”

Francoise stood up, and stammered,—“I am—robbed—robbed,—”

The policeman looked around severely, as if to detect at one glance the culprit. The people answered his look by perfect silence, as if allowing themselves to be searched, knowing that they were innocent.

## A CULPRIT

“‘I dozed a bit here, monsieur, and when I got up, my money was gone.’”

“‘Where did you keep your money?’”

“‘In my stocking.’”

“‘And did you feel anybody meddling with your stocking while you were dozing?’”

“‘No, monsieur.’”

“‘Is there a hole in your stocking?’”

Francoise raised her skirt up to her knees, and looked at her legs. The people laughed, and friends slapped each other's backs. There were indeed a few large holes in both her stockings.

“‘I never knew my stockings were so torn.’”

“‘It must have fallen through one of those holes.’”

“‘My God! My God! All my money! All my money!’” And she burst into tears.

“‘I think you'd better come to the station, and make your complaint to the authorities.’”

The policeman, straight as a fir-tree, and Francoise bent as a reed by rain and wind, walked to the headquarters. As they passed the streets, people made way for them, and some more curious than the rest, followed them.

“‘She must be drunk.’”

“‘No. She walks straight enough. I rather think she must have stolen something.’”

“‘It's a disgrace for a woman of her age to be dragged to the police-station.’”

“‘She's crazy. Can't you see it in her eyes?’”

“‘What does she scratch her legs like that for all the time?’”

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

“Nervousness. Sure sign of guilt.”

\* \* \* \*

When the required preliminaries had been made by the officer, the magistrate asked: “Your name and occupation?”

“Francoise Deland—servant at M. Latour, 42 Rue D’acier.”

“How old are you?”

“About fifty-two.”

“What did you do on the Boulevard?”

“I was dozing, Monsieur, dozing a bit—being very tired.”

“Did your master allow you to go out?”

“Yes, monsieur, I was very hot, and a bit sick.”

“And you dozed—and—”

“When I woke up, my money was gone!”

“Your money? How much was it?”

“Three hundred and eighty francs, Monsieur.”

“Three hundred and eighty francs! Three hundred and eighty francs! Your employer’s money?”

“No, Monsieur, my own—my own—my savings for all the years.”

“Three hundred—and eighty—francs—your own—savings—”

The magistrate looked at the woman, his eyebrows knit to a sharp point. Francoise trembled.

“Why do you tremble?”

“I don’t know, Monsieur. I am sick. All my money gone!”

“All your money gone! Do you mean to tell me that you would keep so much money in your stocking?”

## A CULPRIT

Are there no banks in this city?"

"Yes—Monsieur—but I was always afraid of banks. You can't be sure—when they are robbed—and a poor woman like me—"

"Poor woman—with three hundred and eighty francs! Look here, Francoise Deland, one of two things—either you did not lose three hundred and eighty francs—or you stole that money—confess now."

Francoise opened wide her mouth and eyes.

"Come—confess now—or there will be trouble for you!"

Francoise began to weep. "Monsieur—I swear—I swear—it was my money—three hundred and eighty francs—and I lost it!"

The magistrate stamped his foot, and struck his desk with his fist. "Did you hear me? Confess—or—"

Francoise did not answer. She hid her face in her palms, and sobbed.

"Officer, go at once to Monsieur Latour, 42 Rue D'acier, and bring him here, also Madame Latour, if she is there."

The officer left. Francoise looked up, not understanding.

"Now sit in there. We shall soon find out the mystery of the three hundred and eighty francs." Francoise was pushed into an adjoining little room by a policeman, and the door closed upon her.

\* \* \* \*

Monsieur and Madame Latour arrived out of breath, being stout both of them, and over-excited. The magistrate bowed to them, and explained in very suc-

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

cinct terms the situation. He believed, he said, from his wide study of faces, that Françoise must be dishonest, a thief, or a liar. Besides, she had trembled before him, and wept at the wrong moment—infallible symptoms.

Mme. Latour at once recollected that some silver spoons were missing, that two francs had disappeared one day quite mysteriously, and that Françoise always rubbed her legs, saying that she suffered with rheumatism, when she probably was feeling for her money. Monsieur Latour recollected nothing in particular. He had always thought Françoise a good old woman.

“You always trust people”, Mme. Latour complained. “Monsieur—my husband is the easiest man in the world.”

“But, my dear, when you have no reason to mistrust.”

“No reason, indeed!” she exclaimed, “See, where your easy ways lead you to!”

“One should always suspect, Monsieur,” added the magistrate.

“Thank you Monsieur for telling him this. Maybe your words will have a greater influence over him than mine.”

“You don’t think though that she had three hundred and eighty francs or that she stole that money from you?” asked the Magistrate.

“Where is the money, Monsieur, I might recognize it. I remember the two francs had a spot—”

“No, no, you did not understand me, Madame. We

## A CULPRIT

have no money here. She claims she lost it."

"Oh! I thought the money was found—and you wished me to identify it. For in that case—"

The magistrate smiled. "No, Madame."

"Perhaps," said Monsieur Latour, "perhaps Francoise has really lost some money—and said three hundred and eighty francs purposely—thinking the government would refund it—she is a simple woman, Monsieur.

"Again you trust people, dear!"

"But, my dear—"

"Bring in the culprit," ordered the magistrate to an officer. Francoise bent like an octogenarian, her face all muddy from tears, appeared.

"Your employers do not seem to be sure whether it was their money that you lost or not. Won't you confess, Francoise?"

She looked, dazed, at the magistrate, then at her employers, and opened her mouth several times, but could not articulate any sound.

"Well, tell us."

"Come, Francoise", added M. Latour, gently, "tell us."

"You need not be soft with her, dear. Francoise, was that money ours?"

Francoise shook her head.

"Monsieur", Monsieur Latour exclaimed suddenly, beaming with his thought, "perhaps Francoise has only dreamt that she had the money and lost it. She did not feel well to-day. Eh, Francoise, is that right?"

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

Francoise tapped her legs again, and stared at Monsieur Latour.

“Madame Latour, do you charge this woman with theft?” asked authoritatively the magistrate.

“I—don’t—know—I must look around the house.”

“But, my dear, we never had three hundred and eighty francs at home.

“What are you meddling in for ? And how do you know that I never had three hundred and eighty francs at home ? As much attention as you pay to the household !”

“Will you keep Francoise in your custody, Madame Latour, until you have made a close examination of your belongings— or shall we imprison her until then ?”

“We’ll keep her, Monsieur, we will”, interposed Monsieur Latour.

“Don’t be so easy about it. And supposing she did steal, and supposing she should steal again ?—”

“She won’t—she won’t—will you Francoise ?”

Francoise did not answer.

“I’ll keep her, but on condition that she won’t get any pay until I have examined and investigated closely everything.”

“Well, then, Francoise Deland—you are fortunate in having such employers. Go with them, and don’t disappoint their trust”, said the magistrate fatherly.

“Come, Francoise”, added Monsieur Latour, seeing that the old servant did not budge, come”. And he took her arm.

## A CULPRIT

“You need not be so easy, dear. He spoils all my servants.”

The magistrate and the officers winked at one another, interpreting “spoiled” in their own fashion.

“And if the money should be found”, added Madame Latour from the door, “please notify me at once, that I might identify it.”

“Yes, Madame.”

## DEAD LEAVES

THE old woman lay outstretched in the unpolished coffin. She seemed straight now and tall, although when alive two days ago, she was tiny and bent, her head always scanning the earth, disproving thus man's majesty, that he alone of all animals looks directly into God's million eyes, the stars. Her face showed unpleasantly the contour of her skull; indeed, it was already a skeleton, but covered with thin yellow leather not to hurt the sight of the living, and there was nothing about her toothless lips to indicate that divine smile generally accorded to the dead.

The room was still very neat. The old woman had always been a fine housekeeper. She would raise her bony, bent body as some thin dog that stands on his hind legs, and would clean every speck upon the walls and the humble furniture. When she lay dying on her bed, her eyes, which were sharp and farsighted, noticed some unclean spot upon the ceiling. She raised her hand feebly, and made a motion as though cleaning the place; her old husband and an aged neighbor who was there, whispered to each other that she probably saw the Angel of Death coming down upon her, and she tried to drive him off. It was then that they knew in all certainty that she was dying. Now her poor closed eyes rested forever from the annoyance of this muddy planet, and a

## DEAD LEAVES

few flies felt at liberty to buzz undaunted about the room, even at times touching their dead enemy's eyelids or sharp almost needle-like nose.

Within an hour or two the undertaker was to come, and remove the corpse. Meanwhile two old women, next door neighbors, were sitting at the window, whispering to each other.

"Yes, she was a good soul, and cleaner than any old woman I've ever known."

"I remember when I was sick last year, she kept her own house and mine, and never seemed tired out."

"She had a wonderful constitution. You know, I thought many times—'This crippled little body will outlive another generation of strong people.' And now, here she is dead." And she sighed a long sigh that fills the lungs to the apex, and cheers one.

"I should not be surprised to see her get off, and begin clean around."

The husband of the deceased sat in a dark corner of the room, a yellow-faced man, bald to the neck, and shaking incessantly his head, as if to say to all things, "No, no." His eyes were widely open, but he saw nothing at all. Of all the seventy-five years that he had lived, it seemed nothing had remained. A mocking wind had blown away the débris of memory immaculate, as mocking autumn winds whirl around the dried, twisted leaves of withering trees, and whistle them far off, leaving the ground spotless.

For more than a half-century that little body in the coffin had been his faithful wife; for more than a

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

half-century they loved each other, first passionately, then as the years passed on, quietly like brother and sister. It was a fire that first burst in long tongues of flame, then gradually subsided, covered itself with a hillock of ashes, but never died out, and always kept warm. They had a little son, who died many years ago; they had friends, who were all buried; they had money which was lost; they had laughter, and tears, and hopes, and disillusiones,—but all these things, this kaleidoscope of life had been washed off the screen, and the screen crumpled up, and thrown away. . . . And the old man sat huddled up in the large chair, the straw of which was coming out of its heavy belly, and saw nothing, knew nothing of seventy-five years.

“I don’t know why people want to live many years,” whispered one of the old women to the other.

“I suppose it’s because they’ve never known what it is to be old. Now, what do you think her old man will do without her?”

“She was a wonderful wife to him.”

“He was never so easy to get along with,—very irritable.”

“I suppose he’ll be taken care of by the charities.”

“The charities!” exclaimed the other, and laughed like the nerve-racking tearing of fuzzy cloth, showing two long yellow teeth, one in either jaw. “Don’t you know what the charities are?”

“I don’t think he has any relatives. I never saw any come up.”

“No, it was rather a mysterious couple,—never talked of themselves.”

## DEAD LEAVES

"Who knows what their life has been?"

Then each woman's mind painted on a swiftly turning canvas a life for the silent corpse and her silent husband. These were, in general, unpleasant lives, suspicious, vulgar, obscene, crowded with pain and disillusion,—lives that old disappointed women like old disappointed gods could create.

"You can never tell who people are."

"Yes, it's true,—you can't."

"When is the undertaker supposed to come?"

"Should be here by this time."

"I am getting chilled. I should like to go in and make me a cup of warm coffee."

"I guess we better wait, anyhow. He seems all upset today."

Then there was silence again. The old woman lay eternally still in her coffin; her old husband, weary, fell asleep in the large chair; whose straw was dripping slowly; the flies buzzed dreamily about the corpse, the old women were looking out of the window and thinking of their kitchens, of warm clothes, of coffee, of dead old women, and poor old men. . . .

The undertaker came, the coffin was sealed, and carried out: The old women followed, shedding a few cold tears. The door was closed with a bang. The old man deep in his chair was forgotten. He was not supposed to follow the hearse, anyway. He had heard no noise, and was sleeping on. Then he awoke and looked about him. It seemed to him that something strange had taken place; he tried to recollect for a few minutes, but the canvas of life was being

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

washed incessantly clean of all pictures. He rose, walked to the cupboard, took some coffee, that his wife had made, for she made coffee for a week at a time, warmed it, and drank, while his head, bald to the neck, shook and shook, saying to all things "No, no." . . .

The wind, the master piper, whistled his eternal Te Deum through the chimney. . . .

## THEIR DREAMS

**J**ERROLD WILSON'S back was gradually acquiring the bent of his profession, though his thin face, colorless and drawn, and his dull blue eyes already indicated what he had done for fifteen years. For fifteen years, six days a week, and fifty weeks a year (for his employer was a kindly man, who freed him for two weeks at each revolution of the earth around the sun) Jerrold bent over gigantic ledgers, and read within the mysterious position of numbers, the losses and profits of his firm.

He had not meant to work as a bookkeeper for so long a period of time; he had had several plans. He might become the superintendent of the concern; he might go into business for himself; he might engage in a totally different work. But all these plans gradually vanished in the icy embrace of daily needs, even as the seeds of some of the prettiest flowers are frozen by the evening's chilly caress. Jerrold, like the millions of Jerrolds that had preceded him, and like the millions of Jerrolds that shall follow him into dim futurity, gradually passed from the period of hope to that of rebellion, and from that of rebellion to that of dull acceptance. It is so rare indeed that a caged beast after a number of years either tries to break the iron bars or devour the keeper. Thus, Jerrold and the gigantic ledgers became two sides of one single object, and neither in his waking hours nor in his dreams, could they be separated.

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

Jerrold Wilson was now thirty-three, and for the last four years married to a good little woman, who accepted him with his dull blue eyes and his growing hump, as well as with his ledgers, his high desk, his fifty weeks of yearly labor. If Jerrold had pictured himself at any time a superintendent or a president of a large concern, Anna, his wife, could never think of him other than what he actually was. And she was content, for she had seen what evil consequences ambition might bring, as in the case of her own father, who never could remain a full year in one occupation or two years in the same city, and whose family was either on the point of being dispossessed or starving; or in the dreams of her father on the point of gaining a million.

It was June, and as rare a day as any poet might have a yearning for. When Jerrold left the office, it was still full daylight, and even the heart of the city of New York was by some magic filled with a phantom smell of grasses and flowers, and two butter-flies, white, as newly-wedded brides, dashed through Broadway. And the warm sun unpasted Jerrold from his ledgers, and he began to dream and to plan as he had not dreamed and planned for months, for years, perhaps. He was a superintendent, he was a member of a large firm, he was a farmer owning his garden and his home, and his little Anna was the gay mother of his daughter and son, and he was straight and stalwart, a prominent member of the community,—a mighty architect building his castles in Spain.

## THEIR DREAMS

Jerrold walked fast, and his heart was a drum upon which the Future beat her victory marches with silver sticks. He yearned to reach home, to embrace his Anna, to tell her of his hopes, to picture to her wealth and joy; he could not keep so much happiness within himself,—he needed to proclaim it to all the world. Oh, that he might shout aloud across Broadway!

Anna was a good little woman, plump, dully content, living in the present, forgetting the past, fearing to think of the future. She clung to her husband faithfully,—should not a wife do so? She was a splendid manager of her home, and intolerably clean. She could see specks of dust hidden behind tightly nailed woodwork, and detect ashes of atomic size upon a dark carpet. She had a manner of walking through her rooms that did not touch anything, that hardly disturbed the spotless sleepy air. Anna's judgment of a person was primarily his cleanliness and neatness, and though Jerrold could never have been considered a careless man by any manner of means, it took Anna months to train him to that perfection of cleanliness which should make him worthy of her.

Though Anna was not romantic, she had experienced about three months of that condition of the soul, two and a half months of the courtship, and the first two weeks of her married life. And this beautiful day of June, as she sat at the window to rest, she longed to be courted once more, and relive the first two weeks of her marital existence. With

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

this yearning at heart, she looked innumerable times at the clock upon the mantelpiece, and accelerated in her imagination the eternal tick-tick of Time.

Jerrold entered quickly into the house, and in his enthusiasm, forgetting all the instructions he had received at Anna's hands for four years, threw his hat upon the table, his newspaper upon a chair, and twisted the table-cloth sadly out of the center. He was going to embrace his wife tightly, when the latter, seeing the disaster he had caused, forgetting her visions, her courtship, everything, screamed:—"Oh, oh, Jerry, Jerry, what are you doing? What are you doing?"

Jerrold stopped, chilled, and asked hoarsely,—  
"What am I doing?"

"Look at the table-cloth, your hat, your paper, the carpet!"

It was all over. Jerrold awoke,—but not fully, and like one who is not fully awake, he was petulant, and either to avenge himself or simply in an unconscious effort to awake entirely, he pulled off the table-cloth and threw it angrily upon the floor.

"There you are, pesky woman!" he shouted.

Anna had never seen him in this mood, and never heard him use such adjectives before her noun.

He continued,—  
"It's because of your petty, stupid cleanliness that I shall die in the harness." He did not really know what to say; he was no longer angry, and wished to excuse himself by accusing her.

Anna could not answer. She burst into tears. Jerrold would not yet wholly give in. He left the

## THEIR DREAMS

table-cloth upon the floor, and began walking up and down the room. His dreams had vanished, his plans had been scattered in the winds, the ironic winds which blow on forever, and he felt his very appetite which came to him so regularly, change into an unpleasant sensation in his stomach.

Anna wept, and through her tears, she said:—

“Just because I loved you, just because I saw you again courting me, and I was longing to see you, and jump upon your neck, and kiss you, kiss you—”

Jerrold stared at her.

Anna continued—“That’s what I get for my love!”

He was on the point of telling her what he had thought, what he had dreamed, why he had come in in that fashion,—but it seemed so long, so useless, so intricate,—that he only moaned.

He picked up the table-cloth, carefully covered the table, hung his hat upon the rack, and folded his newspaper. He had become himself once more, mild, dull, stupidly content. The ledgers pasted themselves tightly once more upon his back which was turning into a gentle hillock. Anna, seeing him arrange things, stopped weeping, grew reconciled once more, forgot her romantic mood, and rose to prepare supper.

As they were eating, Jerrold thought,—“When we both dream again, shall we both be rudely awakened again? I think it were best we’d never dream, at least not at the same time.” Anna was thinking,—“Why are men so careless? I wonder if he really

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

straightened every tassel of the table-cloth. I must go and see. . . .”

## TIME

**H**IS wife's death made Arthur disconsolate. Though he was only a little over forty, he considered himself very old, and unable to form new connections. For many years he and his wife had led a very secluded life, and the philosophy he had formulated about people and friendship made him too mistrustful to seek sympathy from others. He sought sympathy, therefore, in the memories of his wife and his past life. Emma's childish face looked at him whimsically out of eternity, and he could feel her pouting lips press kisses on him—she loved to kiss like a little maniac, incessantly—and he could hear her loud voice—a spoiled child's voice—call him endless pet names,—names of all sorts of animals, and birds and things, impossible sounds, inverted words—he could hear her stamp rapidly, like some miniature engine, her left foot, tiny as a little girl's whenever she would become impatient over his ignorance of household matters. Yes, he had been very happy with Emma—Emma was a wonderful woman, and faithful, faithful as a dog or a child—faithful, except for one episode in her life. Arthur remembered that episode very distinctly, in fact, he remembered it better now than he realized it then. It was a year or two after their marriage that Emma began to correspond with Fred. He lived in the West, and had come to New York for a short visit, during which time—he made

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

the acquaintance of the young couple. He was very intelligent, rather handsome, and very lonesome. When he returned West he begged of his new friends to write to him. Arthur wrote one or two letters, then very indolent by nature, stopped; Emma, on the other hand, continued to write—long, half-lyrical, half philosophic letters,—always about love, and life, and virtue, and morality, and immorality. Fred answered even oftener—a letter a day, sometimes two, in the same vein, arguing or admitting, coloring everything with descriptions of the beautiful Nature which surrounded him.

Arthur remembered that at first he found this perfectly proper, but that after a time, something like a worm or snake began to munch at his entrails; that he felt heavy and miserable, that he begged his wife to stop her correspondence, that she refused, that they began to quarrel, long, endless quarrels. . . Emma must have written of these quarrels to her friend, who thinking himself a knight of old, came to New York to rescue the lady. . . . Then followed a week's desertion, a stifled scandal, a repentance, a forgiveness, and long, long, sleepless nights, miserable nights, eternal nights,— and then gradually an acquiescence to fatality, a slow forgetfulness—a complete oblivion—it was many years ago—fifteen, sixteen, almost seventeen—and now Emma was dead—and he was alone—remembering. . . He did not bear her ill will for her youthful escapade,—had he not learnt enough to understand life and things? He only longed for her, for her dear presence. . . . If he had only some one to

## TIME

talk to of her, to relate her charm and her tenderness! He knew too well that people would listen and laugh, and think him a bore. Who is interested in a widower's sorrow?

But as he was remembering, a desire to see his old rival Fred overcame him. Fred would be interested to hear of Emma; they would talk over a cigar about her love and wonderful personality. There was no reason for jealousy any more,—they were both old now, and Emma was dead. And Arthur began to love Fred, the only living thing that united him to his wife. He decided to go West, and see him, and if agreeable to both, to establish himself there, and live like two brothers. Certainly, Fred could have nothing against him, since HE was willing to forgive. . . .

After much trouble, Arthur found Fred's address, and one evening he boarded a train that would take him to his former rival and present dearest friend. A thin, constant rain was dirtying the windows of the car, and Arthur, chilly, huddled in a corner, and tried to think, to plan, to remember,—but his brain was like a hollow shell, that lies still and dumb pressed against the sands of the shore. . . .

Arthur reached his destination in the morning,—a beautiful rose-colored autumn morning. He took this for a good omen,—for no matter how skeptical we might be about life and divinity, there still lurks in us the vague thought or hope that some one is leading us by the hand, and aright.

Arthur found Fred home alone. He was mending a bicycle on the verandah. Arthur recognized him at

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

once, although something struck him at the heart to see the havoc the years had done,—the hair torn out, the face creased and re-created, the heavy bags beneath the eyes, the useless load of flesh and fat.

“Don’t you recognize me, Fred?” he asked.

Fred recognized him, but by an ancient instinct, which tells us to hide our heads in the sand, that we might not be seen, he answered,—“No sir. Who are you?”

“Come, look at me closely.”

He looked closely, and shook his head. He had just read some Italian story, a vendetta affair, and wished to gain time, to prepare himself for a fair combat.

Arthur felt he was recognized, but feared, and wishing to put an end to this theatrical situation, he grasped Fred’s hand, and said,—

“Come, I am Arthur. Don’t be uneasy to see me. I am the best friend you have, and I have come on a most friendly mission.”

“Oh, is it you, Arthur? I did not recognize you. You have changed a lot. We are pretty old. Well, such is life. What can you do?” He spoke quickly, wishing to hide his previous emotions.

“Come in, Arthur.”

Fred preferred to speak with him in private. Who knows, after all, what a man may have to say after so many years of separation?

They seated themselves at a table, and remained silent for a while. When, Arthur, wishing to speak of his object at once, and ease his friend’s mistrust, said abruptly, and without preparation:

## TIME

“Emma is dead.”

“Is that so? When did she die?”

“About a year ago.”

“What was the trouble with her?”

“I don’t know,—her heart probably. She was getting weaker steadily, and then one day, she collapsed.”

Fred tried in vain to remember Emma. She had slipped his mind many years ago. He only remembered that she had a very small foot, and on her right cheek a tiny black spot. With these premises it was indeed hard to reconstruct her whole person.

“How old was she?”

“You ought to know Fred. It’s now seventeen years about since you haven’t seen her, and she was about twenty when you knew her,—that makes thirty-seven. Yes, thirty-seven.”

“That’s right, thirty-seven. Life is cruel. Such a young person—”

He wished to continue, but he did not know what to say. And then—what was the proper attitude to take? Should he be very sorry? Should he show contrition?

“Yes, she was a wonderful person,” continued Arthur, “a wonderful little woman, and I have been left very lonesome.”

“Yes, it must be hard to be a widower. Have you any children?”

“No.”

This relieved Fred, for he still feared this visit was not a friendly one,—and who knows, perhaps the

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

object of it was to find out whether a certain child was her husband's or her lover's? Glad about it, he said, "Well, it's a good thing,—no child has remained motherless."

"No, Fred, it's a very sad thing, for I am dreadfully lonesome. A child of hers would have consoled me."

Fred was afraid to say anything to this. He did not know at all what was proper under the circumstances.

"Yes, I am very lonesome, and that is why I have come here; you see, for years after her love for you—no, Fred, you need not worry about this—I haven't come to scold you, as you will soon see—well, as I was saying, for years we led a very secluded life—and now I have no friends—no one—and I long to have somebody to speak to about her—one who knew how dear and charming she was—and you are the only person—you who shared for a short time her love—let's see—for just one week—it began on a Saturday evening, and ended the next Saturday morning—you would be the only person, I thought, who would understand me, and be willing to speak about her."

At this moment, a woman's gruff voice was heard from the verandah scolding some child.

Fred shivered.

Arthur continued: "You may have some cherished memories that I should be happy to hear. Her name even would be welcome to me. I like to hear it. I speak to myself for hours together, and call her,—  
"Emma—Emma—Emma—a dear name for her, don't you think? You must have called her many a time,

## TIME

and must have thrilled at it. I confess years ago I despised you for this—I could have killed you—but now, I love you for it—I am happy she gave you a bit of her affection—otherwise I'd be so lonesome now. Believe me, Fred, I mean it."

The woman's gruff voice continued to scold.

"You are like a brother to me now, and I should want you to feel the same way about me. I mean to stay with you—you need not fear—I have money."

"I know, I know, I don't fear."

"We shall spend many hours talking of Emma, as our cigars shall burn out, one after another—like her dear life."

"I don't smoke."

"Oh, don't you? Well, that's a pity. Then over a glass of wine or beer—you know—to make us dream—"

"I don't drink."

"Oh is that so? How is that?"

"I am the President of the Moral League of our City."

"So? Is that true?" Arthur became uneasy, and his thoughts were disturbed, as though loud bells had been suddenly struck.

The woman's voice still scolded,—long, moral precepts about good and bad, wickedness and righteousness, heaven and hell, the lord and the devil, of tongues being pulled out, and hands chopped off. And now and then, a thin voice answered, wailingly,—“Excuse me mother, excuse me.”

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

Arthur remained silent, trying to gather back his thoughts.

"I might as well tell you", said Fred, "after the little affair—with—your wife—I realized my great sin—and I repented—and turned good—that's the truth of it."

"What do you mean—you turned good? And you call that a little affair?"

"Well, wasn't it? I was only a young man—I made a mistake—"

"It might have been a mistake—but the memory of it—we are only dealing in memories—Emma is dead—and we are both old."

"That's exactly what I mean—we are old—I am married—I have children—"

Arthur stared at him. And the thoughts that he tried hard to gather back, scattered again, and he remained silent.

"My wife is the daughter of a very devout Christian—a retired minister—and as I told you I am the President of the Moral League of our City."

"Have you never spoken to your wife about Emma?"

"Of course not. I did not see why I should speak to her—of—your wife. She is the purest woman in the world—and—such things—"

"And Emma—Emma?"

"Come now, don't be angry. But you know as well as any one that if a woman does what she has done—"

"You dare to speak in this manner of Emma? Of Emma?"

## TIME

“Now please, don’t shout! My wife is on the verandah, and she might hear—I told you that I have repented—and I am now old—and—”

“Well, did I come to scold you about it? Did I come to blame you? I told you I have come to live here, to be as a brother to you—to talk with you—”

“And I am repeating that I am now a married man with children—and my responsibilities—both to the family and to society—”

The woman’s gruff voice stopped, and she appeared in person,— a short, heavy individual, with very red eye-lids. Seeing a stranger, she was taken aback.

“Why didn’t you tell me you expected some one, Fred? Look at me, not dressed, not combed.”

“I didn’t know, dear. I didn’t expect—”

“You always have unexpected visits,—always working for the good of others. I’d like to see what reward—”

“No, dear, this gentleman is not on charity business.”

Meanwhile, a little boy, his face muddy from tears, came in, and his mother, disgusted with him, dragged him out by the arm.

“Come, I’ll wash your face, and if you disobey again—”

Arthur stood up.

“Well, it’s true, Fred, I understand—you are married—you have children—how many, by the way?”

“Four.”

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

"Four—well, it's quite a business to raise them, I suppose."

"You can hardly realize it. You ought to consider yourself happy for not having had this trouble."

"There is another train leaving for the East at two, I believe, isn't there? Well, I still have time to look about the city, and get to the station."

"Don't go yet. You'll have dinner with us. I'll go and tell my wife. She hates unexpected things—her heart—you know. But she is a wonderful woman—the purest woman—"

"No, no, don't take the trouble, my friend. For a woman with four children it's too much to receive guests for dinner."

"She works so hard, the poor woman."

"Fred! Fred!", the gruff voice called from the kitchen, impatiently.

"All right dear, just a minute please."

"Well, good-bye, Fred."

"Good-by."

When Arthur was on the street, he began to laugh loudly, again and again. Passers-by thought the gentleman was a trifle "off." He himself could not understand why he laughed. . . .

## THE GOLDEN APPLE

THE Princess vowed before the Altar of the Goddess of Love and Motherhood that never would she marry a man unless he brought her the golden apple which grows upon the golden tree at the Edge of the World on the Brink which separates Death from Life.

Princes and Kings, young and handsome and famous in battles, from all the five corners of the Earth came to place at her tiny feet their hearts and their fortunes, for her great beauty was known very far and very wide. But without even glancing at her suitors, she would ask, simply, nonchalantly, as if it were merely the time of the day,—“Have you brought me the golden apple of the golden tree?”

Some, despaired, stabbed themselves in her presence; others, braver, promised to obtain the golden fruit, even if the tree had already toppled over into the Land of Death; others, braver still, mocked her and called her a witch, and went home to marry kindlier lasses, and live happily ever after or dream of the cruel princess, and curse her.

Years passed, and no prince returned with the golden apple, and one day as the Princess looked at herself in the small silver mirror she noticed two wrinkles, one at the outer edge of each eye. She shivered, and thought with regret of her vow. She remembered the countless youths who had come to

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

beg her hand, handsome, and strong, and famous. For a long time now no one had knocked at the gate. She sighed deeply and straightened out with her small white fingers the two wrinkles at the outer edges of her eyes.

A month later, the young Prince of ——— who had been held prisoner for many years by his enemies, and who, therefore, only recently had heard about the Princess and her wonderful beauty, was kneeling at her feet, offering his heart and all his domains.

The Princess asked him kindly, reluctantly, with a tumult in her breast,—“Have you brought the golden apple of the golden tree?”

He looked up, dismayed. She spoke quickly, fearing ill consequences,—“But there is enough time to speak of it, Prince. Meanwhile you are my guest and my father’s.”

The Prince replied,—“O Princess, whatever you desire shall be yours!”

That very day, the Princess ordered the three most famous goldsmiths of her Capital to appear before her. When they had made the twenty-four genuflexions, she began: “At the eastern corner of my Estate there is a precipice. On the edge of the precipice, there is an apple-tree. That tree and one of the apples, I order you to gild heavily, so that they shall seem of pure gold, and natural. The rest of the apples shall be destroyed. Within three days, the work must be finished. No one save you and myself must hear the faintest whisper of this. Meanwhile

## THE GOLDEN APPLE

you are my prisoners. My faithful slave shall bring you all the tools and the gold you need.”

They made twenty-four genuflexions, and the Princess clapped her beautiful hands for the faithful slave.

Three days later, at the edge of the precipice of the Princess' Estate, there stood dazzling in the Sun, a golden tree, and on it hung one golden apple, too heavy to be shaken by the winds.

The three goldsmiths having finished their task so splendidly, that they might not brag of it, were choked by the faithful slave. But the Princess, being charitable, gave their widows three handsome husbands, and three small bags of gold coins. The goldsmiths, understanding perfectly the logic of the Princess, being promised a fine monument to immortalize them as the greatest artists of the ages, were very grateful. Thus, the Princess should not be considered cruel by the ultra-modern ladies and gentlemen, who see but the surface of things, and think that Good and Evil are two straight lines instead of most complex and elaborate geometric figures.

The Prince was ready for the great voyage to the golden tree. The Princess pointed to the East, and said,—“This way, my Prince.”

Several hours later, as the Sun was sinking in the West, the Prince came suddenly upon the golden tree. He thought at first it might be the rays of the setting Sun, but soon convinced himself that the tree was of pure gold, for the work of the artists had indeed been perfect, and they really merited the

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

promised monument. And there upon the highest bough the golden apple hung. One blow of the Prince's sword brought it to the ground. He turned it in his hands, weighed it,—it was indeed gold! At first he thought of rushing back to the palace, to place the fruit at the pretty feet of the Princess, but he reconsidered the matter, and resolved to postpone his return for a whole month, that it might not seem so easy to win so beautiful a woman. He hid the apple carefully, and asked lodging of a poor widow in a neighboring village. The widow was half-blind, so that she could not recognize in him a prince. He remained with her a whole month, saw the moon become a crescent, then a half-moon, and finally a full resplendent face,—and he knew it was time to return. He dipped his sword in the blood of a pig, and let it rust; he battered with a hatchet his helmet and his breast-plate; he scarred himself lightly on the chest,—and he set out.

The Princess, meanwhile, had ordered the tree to be chopped down and turned to ashes by her faithful slave, who was also ordered to watch the Prince's whereabouts, that he might not suffer or be in need of things. . . .

There was great rejoicing in the Palace and throughout the land when the Prince returned with the golden apple. The great poet laureate immediately composed a very long poem—which afterwards became an epic—in which he re-told the great exploits of the Prince,—the dragons he fought, the hissing serpents a half-mile long and nine-souled that he

## THE GOLDEN APPLE

chopped, the witches he choked,—all, all, the marvelous deeds of heroism, until he reached the golden tree—a thousand feet in height, on the peak of which the golden apple dangled—how the Prince climbed the tree, the monkeys and squirrels and cats he encountered upon it, the tiniest three times the size of man—how he killed them, and snatched the apple—his return trip—the oceans he had to swim, the forests to cut down—until—at last—he reached the feet of the beautiful Princess! The rusty sword and the battered helmet and breastplate were placed in a museum; the scars upon his chest were soaked with healing oils.

A week later, the wedding took place. The feast lasted for thirty days and thirty nights. Such revelry had never been before and never more will be. The number of flocks of sheep and pigs and the schools of fish consumed, and the great kegs of wine drunk and spilled, the hills of dough turned into cake and bread, the number of fiddles used up, and bagpipes burst, and shoes worn off by the dancing, together with many other interesting details might be read in the 175th Canto of the great bard's masterpiece. . . .

At the end of the honeymoon, the Princess went to the Temple of the Goddess of Love and Motherhood, and kneeling before the Altar, she spoke thus: "O Goddess of Love and Motherhood, I have brought you the golden apple, as I had vowed years before. You know that it is not really gold, that it was not really plucked from the golden tree which grows at the

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

edge of the World, on the thin Brink which separates Death from Life,—but does it not glitter beautifully? Did it not grow upon the tree which was upon the edge of the precipice? Is not a precipice a thin brink between Death and Life? And who knows where the end of the World really is? Accept then, O great and immortal Goddess, my apple; accept, too, these great diamonds, more valuable than a whole golden tree!”

The High-Priest, who was hidden behind the Goddess of Love and Motherhood, whispered something into the ears of the immortal One, and she accepted the golden apple, and the great diamonds.

The Princess was happy ever after, as far as we know. As for the Prince, he never suspected the trick played on him—for what prince, or even commoner, can delve into the mysteries of his marriage? In time he began to consider the Great Epic as truth, and even corrected somewhat the bard in certain minute details of his great voyage.

## WORDS

WILLIAM RAND loved Elizabeth, but the words in which he expressed his passion were weak and unconvincing. He realized himself the great difference between what he felt and what he said. He understood why Elizabeth would not believe him. In his despair, he would become over-eloquent, and then his words sounded like hammer strokes upon empty drums; angered at his failure, he would turn cold and formal, even cruel.

“What things are words—what mocking things!” he would exclaim.

“When one feels intently, one expresses oneself intently,” would always be Elizabeth’s answer. She believed in words. She had read poetry and novels, and passions always found there passionate words.

At last William remained silent. But his silence was as unconvincing as his speech. The features of his face would not assume the pain of his dumbness. They stared meaningless into a meaningless vacancy.

And Elizabeth wept in the night’s silences.

And William Rand walked his way sick with loneliness.

Among all the young women he knew, William liked probably least Miss Donald. She was intelligent, and not homely, but an inexpressible something repelled him. It might have been the fact that she

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

had the habit of twisting her nose at regular intervals, or that her voice, generally soft, would now and then unexpectedly turn to a scream for a few seconds, or perhaps her nails, which seemed brittle and gave the sensation of breaking off, setting the teeth on edge. At any rate, it was a mere trifle,—a mere trifle that is basic, and always remains the dominant factor.

One evening, it was William's turn to take the young lady home from a gathering. They walked in silence for some time. Then suddenly William in bitterness and irony conceived the notion of making love to Miss Donald.

"Let me see what devilish things words might be!"

And abruptly, as if moved by a sudden great impulse, William told the young woman of his long love, told of his deep, pent-up passion. His words were like songs and like perfumes. He took the heavens for witness, and quoted verse after verse, that he never thought he remembered. And all the while, in the back of his head, rolled a mocking laugh. "What words! What words!" it said, as it rolled.

The young woman made no answer. She only looked and listened. William felt that these were the words he had meant for Elizabeth, that love should express itself in this manner.

At last, they reached their destination. William remained silent, and his silence as his words was eloquent. His face assumed a profound sorrow, and a passionate appeal. He grasped her hands and

## WORDS

kissed them several times, without feeling the least thrill, as though he had been kissing gloves. But it was part of the game, and harmonized perfectly with the words.

Miss Donald first turned her face away, as though very much moved, and then looked into his eyes deeply once, and entered the house.

William bent upon himself and laughed, long and repeatedly. He laughed at his listener, he laughed at himself, at love, at words, at kisses. But slowly this humor deserted him, and he felt a very unpleasant chill in his entire body, as though he had suddenly left a warm room where there was much amusement, and found himself alone under a cold autumn rain without an overcoat or umbrella.

“What was the sense in my having acted so stupidly? What will she think of me? And she—of all women! How absolutely calm I was all the time! What was I thinking of all the while? Ah, yes, that I was getting hungry, that she lived so far and the walk would never come to an end, that a man is but a large stomach carried from one place to another on two crutches, that the moon follows one in whatever direction he may choose to go, as the dog’s tail follows the dog, that—that—Elizabeth—that Elizabeth—”

Disgusted, William threw himself on his bed, and passed from one nightmare to another. He was drowned, he was stabbed, he had to walk long marches upon ice with bare feet, while words with small sharp teeth nibbled at his face.

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

The next day he received a letter from Miss Donald. She told him how she had not slept the entire night, how his magic words sang in her ears, and made her heart dance with joy, how he had awakened in her the wonders of a sudden summer, how his lips upon her hands intoxicated her like divine nectar. And that despising prudery and lies, she acknowledged at once that she loved him as passionately as he loved her, and that already she dreamed of some far-off land where they two—they alone—should listen to the nightingales, and watch the myriad stars twinkle in merriment. They alone —. She signed the long letter by her first name, and beneath it the words "Forever Yours."

William was dumbstruck. Being so utterly cold in the matter, he had expected the girl would either feel as little as he, or in her modesty or mock-modesty, criticize him and drop the affair.

He did not know whether to laugh or to take it seriously. But somehow, he felt as in the dream, a multitude of words nibbling at his face. He wiped his face, and tried to dispel the sensation. While he was thinking what to do, he received another letter. This one was from Mrs. Donald. She explained that her daughter, who was also her friend, had confessed their love, and that she wished to tell him how happy she herself was, for she had always liked William, and she knew that no better love, no greater love can be than that of her daughter.

William rebelled. He swore against the two women, against his stupid whim, against his words,

## WORDS

against all words that mock and destroy. He wrote to the mother a short letter, in which he stated that he would come upon a certain evening to explain. He received an answer the next day, praising him for the simple fashion in which he expressed himself, and yet so full of sentiment. In the letter he found a small card with Miss Donald's name, and underneath it the words "As upon that wondrous night!"

William could not understand why his letter did not half explain the women's mistake; why, on the contrary, it added to their illusion. He thought he had written it so coldly, so formally. His words seemed doomed to so much misunderstanding.

"Why could I never write anything convincing to Elizabeth? Why were my words to her so stilted—and to this one—"

He had promised to be at the house of the young lady in three days. When he came that evening, he was determined to beg forgiveness for the wrong impression he had made by frankly and sincerely stating the entire truth. His face assumed an air of meekness, and was rather pale. So that, when Mrs. Donald opened the door to let him in, she squeezed his hand tightly, and said: "Don't worry, my boy; love makes everybody a little pale, but it's a wonderful thing, nevertheless. The little one looks a little bad, too, today, but it becomes her. You are a lucky dog, even if I say it!"

William's plans were upset, and he muttered: "You must forgive me for—" Mrs. Donald was

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

slightly deaf, and could not hear what he said.

In the parlor, William found a few intimate friends of the family, also some relatives. Each one was delighted, happy to meet the young man. Each interrupted the other, telling of love in general, now in jest, now in its serious import, and always winding up with the marvellous qualities of Miss Donald.

A half-hour later, the young woman entered. As though she had appeared upon the stage, the prima donna of the evening, everybody rose and applauded. She blushed, shook hands with every one, and then a tight, long handshake with William, who was dazed at all this, and stood stiffened near his chair—the most comfortable in the house.

Toward midnight, everybody at once became hungry. A little supper was prepared for them, the mother and daughter excusing themselves frequently, saying they had not been prepared for so lovely a company. William sat listless and despondent. He felt as though he was being squeezed gradually into a wall that was being built, as he had read in some legend of old, and that already the bricks had reached his throat,—and he began to cough. The guests whispered to one another, loudly enough to be heard by William, how love makes one lose one's appetite, and makes one cheerless the first time,—but then—Miss Donald sighed innumerable times. Mrs. Donald embraced her daughter as though she had not seen her for months. A cynical gentleman, very corpulent, swore against all love. His wife covered his mouth and threatened she would tell every-

## WORDS

body how passionate a wooer he had been in his youth, and for that matter, how passionate he still was.

When the party dispersed and William remained alone with the two women, he was on the point of confessing, but he was showered with so much attention by the mother, and looked at with such utter delight and tenderness by the daughter, that he thought he would rather write.

He did not know how to begin his letter or to which of the two women to address it, and vacillated a few days, during which time he received letters glowing with passion and love. He also found that many of his friends were congratulating him. Everybody, it seemed, had known it for a very long time, everybody thought it was a splendid and most appropriate match,—a wonderful girl, a fine mother.

“To break now,” thought William, “would be a crime to the girl”—let alone that he did not know how to go about it. “Besides, no one would believe me, anyhow. And then she loves me. But why can’t I love her? What is it? No, I can’t throw away a woman’s love and honor in this fashion. Maybe I could learn to love her, after all.”

William Rand married Miss Donald. He strove in vain to love her. That same mere trifle that hindered his affections before marriage became even more accentuated after the marriage. But his words, whichever way he said them, spoke love to her, or at least a love that was hurt. His silence was as eloquent. Her answers were always in tune.

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

And the years passed. . . . One night, the couple were looking out of the window, watching the sky and the stars, which appeared unusually tiny. Mrs. Rand turned to her husband and said in a smooth, soft tone, never reaching a shrill note, as was usual with her:

“Aren’t words strange, dear? They are beings quite apart from thoughts. They lead their own lives. And what tricks they play! How often they rule us! They bewitch our tongues, and our tongues turn one way and another, and we are doomed! But the strangest part is that our faces and our acts will endeavor to correspond to our words. Once the word is uttered, we obey it like abject slaves. We would rather undo an act than a word. In fact, an act withers and dies; a word is a perennial thing. Yes, words are strange, and they lord over us!”

And then she laughed a short laugh, and sighed deeply, and began to count aloud the stars.

William stared at her long. A sensation of intense bitterness lodged itself in his throat, as though he had taken a large dose of quinine and could not swallow it. He questioned himself again and again, —“Is it possible that she—she—too—”

And Elizabeth, who had long been dead, and whom he had forgotten, appeared before him, and he heard her say:

“Intense emotions always find words to express them.”

And he laughed loudly, almost cheerfully.

“Why do you laugh, William?” asked his wife.

## WORDS

“Did you see how tiny the stars are this evening? Like the glass pegs I bought to hang the pictures on,” he answered.

### THREE MEN

THREE men were sitting near the broad window in their club-room, watching a chilly rain fall slowly, shabbily upon the face of the City. They were smoking and thinking,—thinking shabby, slow thoughts. At last one of them, tilting his pipe to one end of his mouth, said: “You two have never known the meaning of lonesomeness.” The others sighed and answered nothing. He continued: “No. You have not known its meaning.” It seemed as though he would sink back again into silence; instead, however, he took his pipe out of his mouth, and re-commenced: “You are both married, and there is nothing more wonderful in the whole wide world than to have a mate. For the lack of a mate, many are the things I did,—for the lack of her, or perhaps simply in search of her.”

“There is nothing easier than to find a wife”, said one of the other two.

“Not for me”, re-commenced the first. “Not for me, unfortunately. And now I am over fifty, and lonesome as this ragged rain. I have looked for my mate in twenty different countries,—among the rich and the poor; the good and the bad; the beautiful and the homely,—but I have never found her. Once or twice I imagined I had come across her, but soon I realized that it had only been a *fata morgana*, the desert reflecting the woman I sought.”

### THREE MEN

“But you have seen the world”

“Yes, I have seen the world. I have wandered across the face of the Earth, I have learned the ways of men and women, I have learned their baseness, and occasionally their nobility,—but all this,—how shall it compare to a mate, to a woman that knows, that cherishes you? When it rains, as it does now, she blossoms like a flower for you; in the winter, she is the bright fire-place; in the summer she is the music of birds.” He stopped suddenly, puffed strongly at his pipe, and it blazed again.

The rain, half-asleep, fell, limping.

The second man began, slowly and dragging. “There is nothing easier than to find a wife, nothing; but there is nothing more difficult than to continue to love her year in and year out. My wife is a good companion; she is gentle and faithful, but I’d rather sit with you here, watching the rain. I’d rather walk for hours than to face her, than to feel her arms around my neck. She is very affectionate, and I am courteous. How should I push her away from me? And yet her lips are like sour wax on mine.”

“Oh, to be loved by a woman!” exclaimed the First Man.

“I have betrayed her by three women”, re-commenced the Second Man,—“three women who were neither as pretty nor as gentle as she. And none of them loved me half as well. I have betrayed her, and every betrayal was a torture and an unbearable humiliation for me. All the lies, the tricks, the fears,—but who can love a woman year in, year out?”

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

He tapped nervously on the window-sill. The rain exhausted, fell at irregular intervals, and irritated the Earth.

“To love and to be loved in return,—that is death”, began the Third Man. “I love my wife, and my wife loves me. For twenty-five years we have been together, each the tyrant of the other. What have we accomplished, what have we seen or learned? We hide from the world, to flatter and caress each other. Any man or woman is a hindrance; we drive away all possible friends. I am here with you now, but I long for her, and I know she pines for me. I shall not even wait until the rain stops, but hurry home. You have seen the world, you have known other women, you have tasted sweet and bitter. I have tasted only sweet, sweet,—until I am sick and overcome with nausea.

The three Men looked at one another, puffed strongly at their pipes, but remained silent.

The rain, like the spittle of some disdainful giant cat, was bespattering the sullen Earth. . . .

## ART

**I**SHIJIMA'S poems were sung and recited by all the lovers in the Empire. He expressed in golden words the pain and the joy and the trickery of the great Passion. Everybody said,—“Many must be the poet's love affairs!” Men said it with a pang of jealousy, women with a sudden yearning to be embraced by him. But Ishijima was very lonesome and he had never known love. Out of his dreams and his desires he fashioned his golden poems.

At last, however, Ishijima met the woman that seemed to him more beautiful than his dreams, and he married her. And people said,—“Now he will write poems about his beautiful wife.” Men said it with a sigh of relief; women with a pang of jealousy.

Ishijima loved his wife and was loved by her, and their love was greater and more beautiful than his dreams.

Ishijima could not write any more. His brush traced languidly meaningless characters upon the gorgeous silk. What was there to write? He had neither dreams nor desires, save the lips of his wife, and the lips of his wife were more delightful than any words in any language. Therefore he did not write.

And people gossiped,—“Ishijima, does not write any more. He does not love his wife. Therefore he does not write.” Men said it mockingly; women with infinite compassion.

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

Ishijima thought: "Happiness is the death of poetry." And he mourned the loss of his art, and yearned for his former illusions and pains.

In his despair, Ishijima pondered and ruminated: "The death of love is the resurrection of art",—and he took the soft throat of his wife between his fingers, and pressed, and pressed, until her little body, finer than a carven statuette, lay still and pathetic upon the soft couch, covered with glistening silk on which were embroidered the greatest poems of Ishijima.

But Ishijima could not write. The meaning of words had vanished like colored flames which are extinguished by an evil wind. He sat on his threshold, and drew long parallel lines with his dry brush.

The people talked. And some said,—"Because of a mere woman, the great poet will never write again."

Others: "His hatred for her robbed him of his reason."

Others: "Her cruel ghost has stolen his words."

Others: "She was unfaithful, and her lips had become sour to him. Therefore he killed her."

Others: "Without constant love poets cannot write."

One thought, but never said aloud: "Love is the death of poetry. He loved her too much. Therefore he strangled her. He loves her still more now. How then, shall he think of words? It is best he draws parallel lines with his dry brush,—for who knows what he would say if his brush were wet, and he remembered the meaning of words?"

## EVIL'S GOOD

THE man who had fallen out of the window lay like a bundle of rags on the asphalt floor of the courtyard. A policeman having covered his face and hidden the puddle of blood with bunting, was waiting for the ambulance, warding off meanwhile the crowd. It was uncertain whether the man had committed suicide or had fallen out by accident. As explained by the neighbors either theory was correct, and even perhaps a little of both. He had been out of work, that would be reason enough for self-destruction; on the other hand, it seemed he had never been a hard-working man, and nothing could have pleased him more than idleness. He had been suffering lately a great deal from vertigo, it seemed, but it also seemed that his windows were never or nearly never open. And also perhaps the vertigo in combination with the lack of work, and the rarity of his bending out of windows—who knows?

A young lady passing by stopped for a moment, shivered at the account given by an elderly gentleman, and recollected how meanly she had treated her lover that morning. "What if he should commit suicide?" she thought. "He is capable of that,—proud as he is! I am so very sorry for what I have told him. It was all my fault, any way. I shall be good to him from now on,—very good!" And she walked off, reformed.

A mother going to market with her darling four-

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

year old son, upon hearing the story pointed her forefinger in the direction of the corpse, and said,—“See, dear, what happens if you bend out of the window? See? Will you promise not to bend out again?” The child, fully impressed, promised. The mother squeezed his little hand, feeling he belonged to her more than ever, and remembered having studied psychology, that the best way of teaching is by objective demonstration.

A minister of the gospel whose sermons had become so intolerably dry one almost choked physically, upon hearing them, was struck as if by the wings of an angel, and instantly composed a magnificent peroration on the “Terrors of Suicide” or “Bending Out of the Window of Sin”, based upon the Sermon of the Mount.

A cynic who had been feeling despondent for some time, looked at the rags that erstwhile was man, and felt cheered,—“At last I am convinced once more that life is mud! And being only mud,—what reason have I to feel sick at heart?” And he walked straight to the house of his dearest friend, the priest, and feasted the whole day, tipped handsomely the young cook, pinching her soft cheek until she screamed, and when he returned home, he distributed fifty dollars in charity.

A poet, long neglected, and misunderstood, immediately perceived the similarity between a man falling out of a window and a falling moon, and losing himself in celestial speculation, composed a beautiful poem. “If the editors don’t accept this poem they are asses—as for that matter, they are asses, anyhow.”

## EVIL'S GOOD

Two weeks later he received a check for it. . . .

The ambulance arrived, and the means of gentle inspiration was removed, except that the undertaker could keep his promise to his wife about a fur-coat, and that the grave-digger's little daughter obtained the big doll she had been praying to God for. . . And as to myself—had not my pen been idle for weeks, and was I not worrying that I should never again be able to write another line, and am I not happy now, feeling Pegasus underneath me? . .

In truth, the pains and misfortunes of OTHERS should be encouraged and rewarded, and artificially produced, if Nature should ever grow old and weary of her whimsical and merry farces. . .

In a society composed of intellectuals, I am certain, this would be the case.

## CROSSES

AS my friend undressed, my attention was riveted upon his chest, a broad, massive chest, tattooed with many crosses.

“Well?” he asked quietly.

“The crosses—”

“The crosses? It’s about time you had several on, too.”

“What do you mean?”

“Young fool! Aren’t we Christians? Shouldn’t we put crosses upon the graves of those that died? Should we let their bodies rot without this simple courtesy?”

Not understanding, I looked on.

“You don’t understand? Well—am I not over fifty years old? Was I not a baby once; a little boy that could walk; a big boy that could fight and shout to pierce your ears; a young man that first became conscious of woman; a young man that loved; a young man that was disillusioned; a mature man; a man no longer so young; a man verging on middle-age? Well—where are they all,—the boy, the young man, the mature man? Aren’t they all dead, deader than those you nail coffins over, and lower into deep graves? Aren’t they all buried in here, here?” He struck his powerful chest with his heavy fist. “Aren’t they all rotting? Aren’t they being washed away by the flood of days? Haven’t they the right to demand

## CROSSES

crosses—bits of symbols proving that they once lived and flourished?"

I was overwhelmed by this unexpected tirade. I felt that my mouth had opened very wide, and my eyelids had rolled upward tightly against their sockets.

He walked up and down a few times, then said, calmly: "Whenever you are ready for the crosses, you tell me. I know an expert, and his price is really very low. You don't need yet as many as I, of course, you are twenty years younger."

## WORMS AND BUTTERFLIES

MR. NORTON filled again the glasses with wine,—his and his young friend's. They had been silent now for several minutes, watching themselves in the mirrors facing them. Mr. Norton with his sad, sentimental eyes that gazed so ludicrously out of his big, fleshy face, scarred lightly in one or two places, and Harold with his small delicate features that contradicted a heavy, sensuous mouth.

Mr. Norton had known Harold for several years, from his childhood, in fact. He was very fond of the young man, and though fifteen years his senior, liked to spend a few hours with him now and then, talking over a glass of wine in the back-room of a café which he claimed to have discovered, and which had become prosperous ever since. Indeed, the owner acknowledged the claim, and treated his guest accordingly.

"You young fellows talk about woman, but you know nothing about her. You must live a long time with one to understand her. A butterfly knows nothing about a flower. It takes a worm who is devouring the stem and all to understand it. You see a pretty face, and you jump to conclusions—that's a passionate woman, and your dreams run wild. But you are generally wrong, dead wrong."

The young man listened, smiling ironically. He was very certain he understood woman quite as well as Mr. Norton.

"The quality of woman is not in how she responds

## WORMS AND BUTTERFLIES

to the eye, but to the other senses. What are looks? You heard it so often said that all cows look black at night."

Harold laughed. The older man laughed also, and drank his wine, smacking his lips many times.

"It's only a fool that advises a fellow to marry this girl or that, because he is bound to judge by the face or the words, and if faces do not tell the truth, words are a hundred-fold greater liars. A woman may speak as passionately as a geyser, and be as cold as an icicle; or she may affect a nun's prayers, and be boiling with desire."

Harold sipped his wine slowly, and thought his own thoughts.

"I may be frank with you, Harold. I have known you since you were a child, and now you are an intelligent man, and can understand. I have always loved you, you know," and his eyes filled with tears. Wine always made him exceptionally sentimental and tender. He wiped his face with his handkerchief, and recommenced.

"Yes, I'll be frank with you, and tell you what I haven't told another soul; and, of course, it won't go beyond yourself, it's quite understood."

The young man made a sign of assurance.

"Well, it's a matter of years since I have been unable to touch my wife without a sense of disgust, without feeling my whole body drenched as though by a cataract of ice-water. Now, you know, she is a pretty woman—and I wager she appears to men as a passionate, perhaps voluptuous, woman. Am I right?"

"I don't know—I—"

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

“Well, you’re an old friend, and you may not have dared to think of her at all in that light. Well, what’s the trouble with her? I have tried to analyze the matter with the care of a scientist—you know how I am when I tackle anything. Not that she is cold in the sense that she repels me, when I approach her—on the contrary—she always appears—pretends, perhaps, to be passionate, you understand—she has even the ways of a passionate woman—but—maybe it’s all psychological—and maybe it’s all physical—her hand is always chilly—her lips—her embrace—there is something peculiar—I can’t explain—one must experience it—to understand me—and as you will not—”

Mr. Norton drank another glass of wine, and laughed, and Harold sipped his, and smiled to keep in tune.

“What I mean is—that you can’t tell the nature of a woman, unless you’ve known her for many years. And so, when you marry, marry a woman whom you’ve known, and who has stood the test.” The older man burst out into a long, stupid laugh, which might have been bitter or simply lascivious. “And if you don’t get the right wife—well, you know—there might be other women who—” and he continued laughing.

The young man looked at him long, and thought his own thoughts.

Mr. Norton took out his gold watch, and stood up with a bound. “I am quite late. I’ll see you again, I hope, in the near future. You are a delight to be with. Well—‘there is truth in wine,’ as the old Romans used to say; but, my dear, a friend knows

## WORMS AND BUTTERFLIES

how to forget as well how to remember.”

“Trust me.”

“I do.”

\* \* \* \*

An hour later, Harold was admitted into Mrs. Norton's apartment. Mrs. Norton opened the door slowly and cautiously for him. She was a woman of about thirty-three, plump, white-skinned, with a languorous air.

“My dear, you are late. I feared you wouldn't come any more.”

“I was detained by a very important personage.”

“Who?”

“Your husband.”

Harold laughed, as he put away his coat and hat.

Mrs. Norton then embraced the young man, looking the while tenderly into his eyes.

“You seem upset, dearest.”

“Upset? No. You must see me strangely amused. Your husband told me a very funny story.”

“You know what we agreed upon—never to speak about any person, except yourself and me. So—”

She took his arm, and they walked over to the soft, many-cushioned sofa, near the window. A little canary bird imprisoned in a cage on the wall opposite sang his sweet, monotonous notes.

“See, dearest, our bird sings you welcome. Everything here opens its arms to you.”

She reclined, and drew his head upon her breast. They remained silent for a few minutes.

“Yes, it was funny, the story—really,” and he laughed.

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

"Please forget it, love."

"I should have never believed it—never."

Mrs. Norton put her plump hand over his mouth. He shivered a little.

"You are so unkind today, sweetheart."

As she kept pressing her hand over his mouth, he drew his face away.

"What ails you today?"

"Nothing at all, my dear. Simply it's strange how certain words ring long afterwards in your ears, and louder than when you actually heard them."

"I am getting worried about it. Did he speak about us?"

"Oh, no, he never suspects us."

She drew him nearer to herself, stretched his legs out, covered his face with her arms, and they lay quietly thus for some time.

"Do you love me, dearest?" she asked softly, like the fall of a feather.

"Yes."

"Forever, dearest?"

"Yes."

"You will not betray me?"

"No."

Harold felt choked beneath her arms, and he raised his head to cough a few times. Instead of replacing his head beneath the soft yoke, he put it on one of the pillows, and breathed rapidly and deeply.

"You don't feel right, love. What ails you?"

"Nothing, I assure you."

"It can't be his funny story that—"

He shook his head.

## WORMS AND BUTTERFLIES

She became suddenly very tender, and grasped his head, and kissed it again and again. When she grew tired, she released him, and he breathed with joy the fresh air.

"You don't love me a bit today—not a bit," she whimpered. "Even our little bird has stopped singing. She is hurt, too."

The romantic allusion to the bird made her appear very ludicrous in his eyes. "A big woman like that," he thought, and he looked at her closely, and saw, it seemed to him, for the first time, several deep creases around the eyes—"what do they call them?" he thought,—"yes, crow's feet—"

Tears gathered in her eyes, and she buried her face in his chest. The thick hair gave him a sensation of being choked. "Did he say anything about the hair?" he thought.

She raised her head. "You must promise me never to leave me—not even to get married."

"I shall never marry. You never can tell whom you marry, anyhow—words and faces—" He tried to think of Mr. Norton's exact statement. He could not get it, but he felt its full import.

"It's true. You can't go by appearance, dearest. In men, the same way."

"No, you must live with a person. You must be, so to say, a worm, not a butterfly."

"You know, sweetheart, I never told you, because we promised never to speak about other people than ourselves—but I must tell you—why shouldn't you know everything?—well, my husband—you wouldn't call him homely—"

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

“No.”

“And you wouldn’t call him cold, would you?”

“No.”

“Well, when he approaches me—I shiver with chills. But, he thinks it’s because I’m passionate—”

Harold laughed long.

“Why are you laughing?”

“It’s funny—very funny—”

“What’s the trouble with you today, sweetheart?”

“It’s funny, you know, how men mistake chill—for passion—it’s like touching ice, and you think it’s fire.”

“But when you touch me, dear—,” and she buried her head into his chest, deeply, deeply, so that she could hardly breathe.

And Harold was thinking: “No, it’s wrong to be a worm—it’s better to be a butterfly. Only the butterflies are happy—but for the sake of the butterflies, there must be worms, it seems.”

# PASTELS



## HAPPINESS

THE ANGEL, whom Jehovah sent to alleviate the sufferings of mankind, walked dejected and weary through the streets of the Earth. All his efforts and sacrifices had proved either futile or positively evil. The happier he tried to make man, the more miserable he made him. He was on the point of spreading out his vast white wings, to fly back to Heaven,—when he suddenly heard a man singing most lustily a very joyful song. He had heard people sing before, but never quite in such manner. He looked around, and noticed that the singer was a very poor man—a beggar, probably—one-legged, hopping on two crutches.

“Good morning, brother,” said the Angel. “I am glad to see you so happy this morning. I like to see happy people.”

“Good morning, sir. I am indeed happy this morning.”

“And what makes you so happy?”

“What,—don’t you see?” and he pointed at something moving in front of them.

“No, what’s that?” asked the angel.

“Don’t you see the fellow who shoves ahead on his knees?”

“Oh, yes, indeed—poor man.”

“Well, I say to myself,—‘Here’s a fellow who is cut in two, while you can still walk, as tall as God made you, although you only have one leg’—and this

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

makes me happy. I thank the Lord for his mercy, and I sing.”

The Angel looked at him, a bit dazed.

“And for that matter, this fellow ought to feel pretty happy himself. I’ve once seen a man with neither arms nor legs. And I think it’s even worse to be blind. Deaf isn’t so bad, although you can’t hear your own voice.”

The Angel continued to be silent.

“The only thing that makes me feel unhappy is people dancing. I think they are positively immoral, don’t you?”

The Angel, who could think very rapidly, beamed with a great joy. Without stopping to give the beggar alms, fearing that he might make him miserable, as he had made all whom he had wished to help, he spread out his great white wings,—and disappeared. . . .

When the usual greetings were over, the Angel spoke to Jehovah, in this manner: “O Mighty Lord of All Things,—after much useless effort and many bitter disillusions, I have at last found what will make men happy.”

“Whatever thou sayest shall be done.”

“Man is only happy when his neighbor is unhappy. Send, O Lord, all kinds of plagues and sorrows upon the Earth,—first on one-half of mankind, that the other might be happy; then on the other half, that the first might be consoled and grow cheerful. Thus Man shall sing his pæan of joy, and his hallelujahs to You forever, O Lord.”

## PASTELS

Jehovah embraced his dear Son, and promised to do as he suggested.

And the promises of Jehovah are never broken.

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## THE THINKER

AMID the heavy-laden trees, he stands, naked and branchless, save for two stumps, one on either side a black cross, on which he himself is crucified. The winds do not shake him, the rain trickles down his bark, and soon leaves him perfectly dry; the sun can make no fantastic shadows,—only a thin black cross, thrown beyond the road-way. He watches the stars and the moon unhampered by the romance of leaves which capture their rays, and dance with them. He knows they are cold and blind. He stands black, and gaunt, and crucified, knowing the meaning of Summer and the meaning of Winter. And always in his heart there is a great hollowness.

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## POPULARITY

THE GREAT OAK, the incomparable Giant of the Forest, lay, struck by lightning, rotting in the road-way. A million ants and numberless worms were creeping and crawling upon him. They praised him, calling him noble and generous. Birds, however, were rocking themselves, and singing upon the branches of other trees.

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

### CHACUN A SA MANIERE

THE THUNDER crashed and roared across Infinity. The Worm, slowly, unconcerned, crept on, in its tiny bits of undulations. . . . A leaf rolled by—the Worm, scared, hid among the grasses, curled for a long time, and pretended death.

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### MOUSE PREACHES ON HEAVEN

IN HEAVEN the mighty spirits of mice, golden-clawed, shall capture the puny, trembling spirits of Cats. They shall roll them on the endless floor of the endless Cellar, and choke them, and bleed them. And the spirits of Cats shall meouw in everlasting agony, for they shall neither die nor ever escape. Thus shall Justice denied Mice on Earth be granted them abundantly in Heaven. For the mercy of KIRIKI, God of the Four Cellars, is limitless and perfect. AMEN!

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GRAIN OF DUST: To be a mountain you must compromise. You must accept millions of other grains. You must let them press against you, stifle you, destroy you. You are no longer a grain of dust. You are a mass, a monster. I shall stand alone, conscious of my own identity. I do not fear the winds. Let them whirl me and dash me about!

---

### A DIVINE JEST

THE WIND, the god of Wander-lust had just re-

## PASTELS

turned from his trip around and within the world. The gods, squatting upon dead stars, were drinking out of silver moons the nectar which is eternal youth. They were laughing in mighty thunder claps at the colossal jests about stars and skies and strange divinities, that the Wind was telling them in his inimitable fashion. . . .

“And what about the Earth?” asked one.

“The Earth? The Earth?”

“Every morning and every evening strange sounds arise from there.”

“Strange sounds?”

“Some of us have thought they might be prayers offered us.”

“Prayers?”

“Morning and evening.”

The Wind puffed his mighty cheeks and thought. Suddenly he understood. And he laughed, and laughed, and rolled in whimsical somersaults.

“What you call the Earth is but the dust my feet raise in circles; and the prayers are my footsteps and their echoes—morning and evening—that is the time between a footstep and the death of its echo—for I am a mighty god. Earth and Prayers! Ha ha ha ha!”

The gods, being wise, recognized their silliness, and laughed uproariously at themselves and quaffed multitudes of moons.

\* \* \*

The Wind has since related the jest about the Earth and its Prayers to all the stars and in all the

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

skies, and has made Infinity roar with laughter. . . .

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## THE OCEAN IN LABOR

THE OCEAN was in labor. She tossed in great agony upon her measureless bed. Her tumultuous cries terrified sailors and fishermen. And the poets of the Earth thought: Wonderful will be the things the Ocean will give birth to—scarlet lands of corals, great sunken cargoes of gold and diamonds, seaports drowned centuries before, and kept intact within her deep sands, moons that loved her and died and fell within her—new young oceans that will crack the Earth and flow, more gaily, more passionately than herself. . . .

The Ocean was still, save for the gentle rocking of the clownish moon; and her murmur was sweet and comforting to sailors and fishermen, and their women at many ports. . . .

On the warm yellow sands lay the offspring of her torturous travail—empty shells, slimy weeds, some young gulls. . . .

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## I AM THE COFFIN

I AM the Coffin. I am the treasure-box of the Earth. Within me are placed, gently, tenderly, jewels most cherished—things kissed and petted and pressed against the heart—laughter frozen on white lips,—tears coagulated like great pearls—dreams colored like fantastic rainbows.

## PASTELS

I am the Coffin. I am the Sacred Keeper of the Sacred Things. I close silently, like a weary mouth. No hand dares to open me—no thief approach.

I am the Coffin. I am the soft arms of Sleep.

I am the song of endless Silence. I am the River of Oblivion.

I am the Coffin. I am the laughter of the gods. I am the heavy shadow of Truth.

I am the Coffin. I am the treasure-box of the Earth. Within me are placed jewels most cherished—rotting flesh, broken dreams, tears frozen into stones, laughter coagulated into muddy pools.

I am the Coffin. I am the great toothless Mouth. I am the large Hand rattling dice of bones. I am the sacred Keeper of the Sacred Things.

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## MORITURI TE SALUTANT

WE who sit at the curbstones of the streets, old and decrepit, glaring with dull envy at the passing youth, insolent with new strength, radiant with recent beauty, throwing us in derision bits of coins,—we—the dying— salute you, O Jehovah, old and decrepit God, sitting on the edges of the stars, glaring with passionate envy at the young Gods, passing, mighty and beautiful, and dropping upon your trembling lap in derision tiny earths and dead moons.

MORITURI TE SALUTANT!

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## ICEBERGS

THE Iceberg glides on, slowly, ponderously, re-

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

remembering vaguely and in bitterness that he had once believed the Sun a God,—a God that would melt him into a great, passionate Sea, roaring and beating against mighty flanks of sand, and juggling upon his foamy finger-tips giant whales and colossal boats, and drowning in tender playfulness stars and moons. He has long ago learned that the Sun, too, is but an Iceberg, the glaring Shadow of himself, gliding ponderously across the sky, remembering vaguely and in bitterness that he had once hoped to be melted into a great sea of stars, balancing upon long blue finger-tips giant earths and flaming moons. . . . The Iceberg glides on, slowly, ponderously, dragging broken waves of foam, and above, the Sun, the glaring Shadow of himself, follows him ponderously, slowly, dragging small crumbling earths and coagulated moons. . . .

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### THE CAT AND HIS SHADOW

THE cat rose slowly. The dim lamp-light threw a great shadow on the wall. The cat watched it keenly. He yawned; the shadow opened its immense jaws. He stretched; the shadow lengthened its lithe body, taking a menacing posture. He sprang; the shadow leaped across the whole room, swallowing in its black maw half of the furniture. He stood still; the shadows shivered back in a great, motionless statue. Dreams of dark forests and mighty combats with lions and elephants crowded into his head, and his claws crept out of their silken sockets; the shadow stretched out gigantic paws ready to capture and tear. "I am a

## PASTELS

tiger! I am a tiger!" meowed clamorously the cat; the shadow's immense jaws opened and closed, as if devouring lions and elephants. A little dog next door barked in his dream. . . The cat cowered; the shadow shrank, and became a shapeless mass. Forests and lions and elephants vanished, and his heart struck sharp, frightened beats against his chest. He spat; the shadow shivered. He lay down again; the shadow spilled upon the floor, between the leg of the chairs, and underneath the lounge.

"I am but a cat", he thought bitterly, and meowed pathetically. He huddled together, the shadow underneath him, and fell asleep.

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## CATERPILLAR AND BUTTERFLY

WHEN he was a caterpillar, he considered himself brother to the worm and the ant. He loved the solid earth, and the hard bark of trees. He hated passionately all winged things,—butterflies, and bees, and birds,—all those that loved the dainty air more than the homely earth. He despised buzzing and humming and singing. He loved silence. In silence all great things were accomplished,—feeding, battling, hoarding. Stalks and trunks were faithful and honest; leaves and petals were fickle and treacherous. In time, he was quite certain, the flying things—butterflies, and bees, and birds, would be exterminated,—while worms and ants and caterpillars would continue to multiply until the earth would bend beneath their weight.

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

When he became a butterfly, he considered himself brother to the bee and the sparrow and the eagle. He loved the air that rocked like a sea, and had waves and tides. The black earth he did not deign to look upon. He alighted upon the perilous tips of petals and leaves. He loved the buzzing of bees, the music of birds, the gentle clatter of his own wings. All that crawled—ants and caterpillars and worms,—the vermin of the world, he despised. He loved things that lived intensely, and died over night—perfume, and honey, and color. He hated things that lived forever—bark of trees, and stalks and thorns. He was certain that before the end of Summer the vermin of the world would be crushed by hooves or eaten by the beaks of birds; and that upon the endless Sea of Air that rocked and had waves and tides, the winged things of the earth would sail in mighty hordes. . . .

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## ILLUSION

THE grey little mouse with pink eyes and three tiny threads of beard, looked timidly up from his trap, and addressed the golden canary, which hopped about in his cage and sang his usual morning song—something about the Sun knocking at the window with golden knuckles, and a red rose he had dreamt during the night, and a great tree he dimly remembered.

“How can you sing so cheerfully,—being a prisoner?”

“A prisoner, I? I am the king of birds, and this is my forest. Therefore, I sing.” Then the grey little

## PASTELS

mouse with pink eyes and three tiny threads of beard, thought and thought, and it seemed to him that perhaps, he too, was not a prisoner, but the king of mice, and his trap a great black cellar,—and so, he began to turn around rapidly, avoiding the sharp points.

“That is well”, said the canary, “I shall sing and you will dance. It will be very cheerful here.”

And when I raised the trap to drown the little mouse, the latter whirled madly about, and the canary sang so loud, he grew hoarse.

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## THE FINAL RECKONING

SOME day, the divine Janitor, who has been loafing for a long time, fearing a general inspection, will become over-industrious. He will throw the Earth, which is the cosmic rubbish,—the lands, the seas, the mountains, mankind, bugs, flees, everything, into a bag, and dump it into some divine lake. Everything will be drowned forever. But many dreams and many thoughts being lighter than water, will float on the surface. Young godlets fishing gold and diamond fishes, will clap their hands in great delight,—“Look, look, baby stars sailing on the lake!”

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## CONSOLATION OR SOUR GRAPES

THE OCEAN: The Sand may hold me in his embrace,—but I spit on him—I gurgle my throat and spit on him—ceaselessly. . . .

THE SANDS: The ocean may spit on me—may gurgle

## AND THE SPHINX SPOKE

her throat, and spit on me—but I hold her tightly in my embrace—tightly. . . .

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### FREE WILL

THE WEATHERCOCK:—I am the master of the winds! I order their course! I call to them: “Now—to the East—now to the West!” I turn about them, and tighten the reins around their necks. When I grow weary, I order them to stop. Like exhausted steeds, they fall at my feet, and sleep. . . .

## PASTELS

### *To Posterity*

I do not believe in you, Posterity. I do not make you the judge of my generation. I am not elated thinking of the statues you will raise to some of us: my vengeance is not assuaged by the evil names you will heap upon others. Time will not be a perspective for you, even as it is not for us. Time will be but the thick dust raised by the hooves of the galloping years.

I do not believe in you, Posterity, as I do not believe in my own generation. You, too, will lie, misinterpret, be puffed up with vanity; you, too, will prefer falsehood to truth, evil to good, superstition to wisdom.

I do not believe in you, Posterity. I am not chagrined that I shall be forever still beneath you. I do not regret that I shall not be able to battle with you for food and liberty. I do not envy your beauty, your knowledge, your virtues. They will be like my own generation's,—the kneaded refuse of the past—our hallucinations made sacred and divine.

I do not believe in you, Posterity. I do not bequeathe anything to you. Not even a blade of grass that may shiver above my grave; nor a cordial salutation from the outer rim of Infinity; nor even a wink of recognition from the blue peak of a white star. I offer you as I offer my own generation—my thumb wriggling upon the tip of my nose.







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